THE ARGOSY

Issued Weekly

BROADNAME WHISPERS

by John Boyd Clarke

Author of "The Locked Door," etc.

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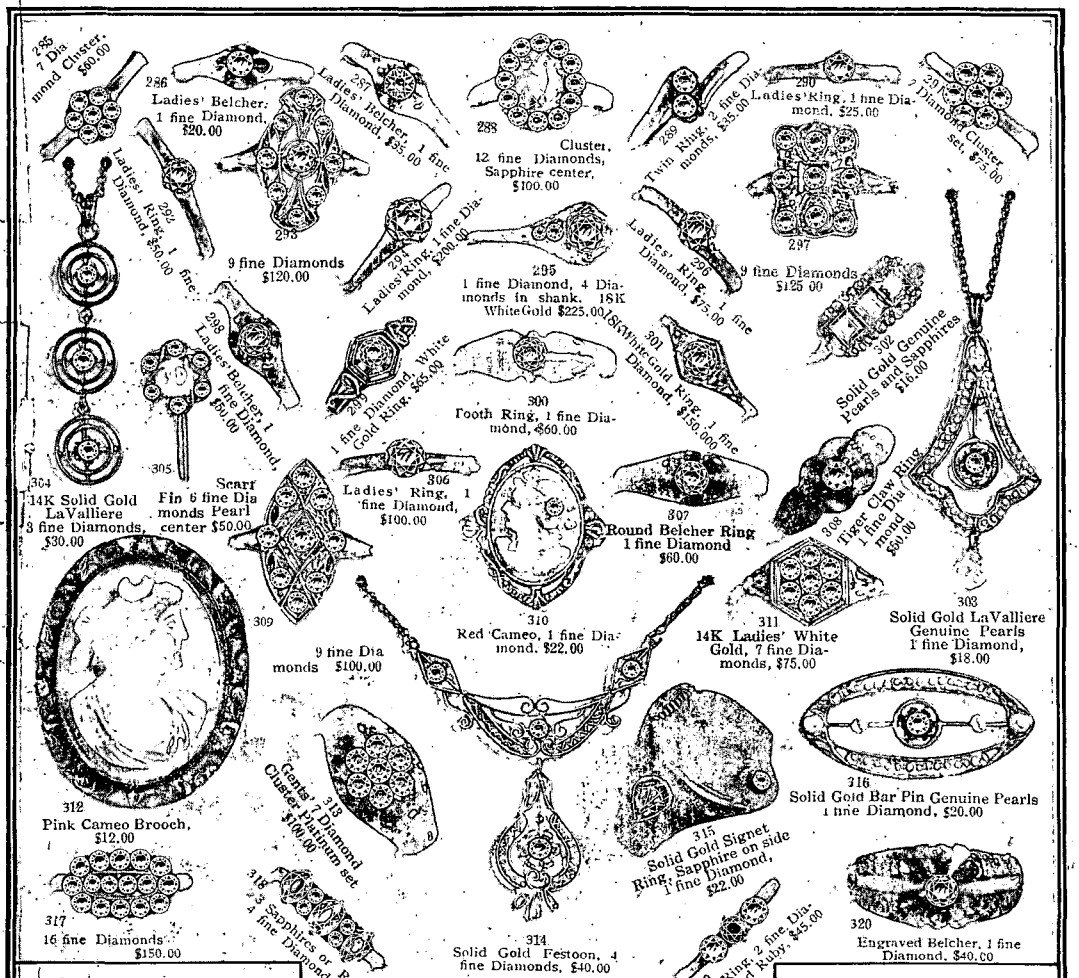
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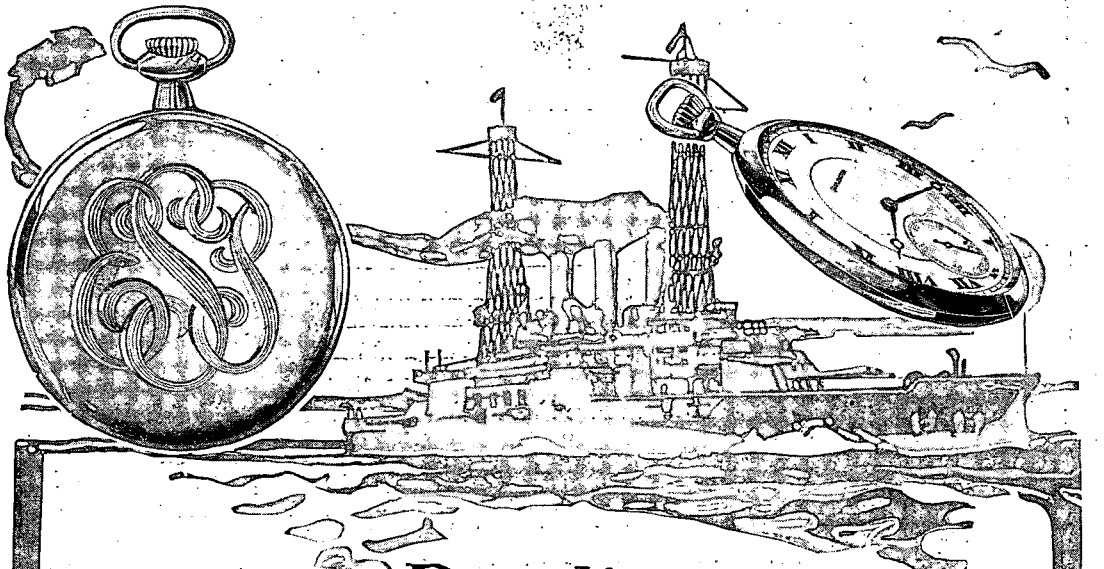

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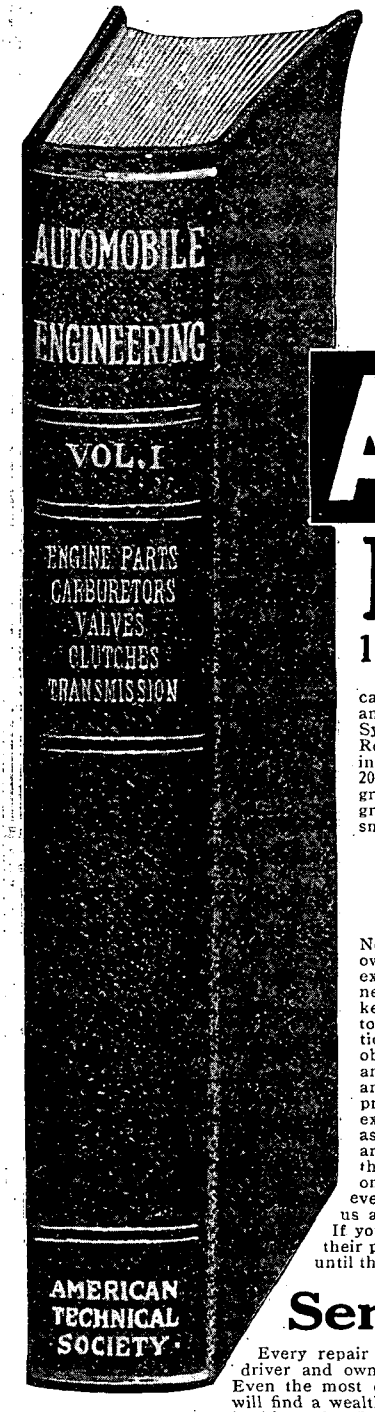

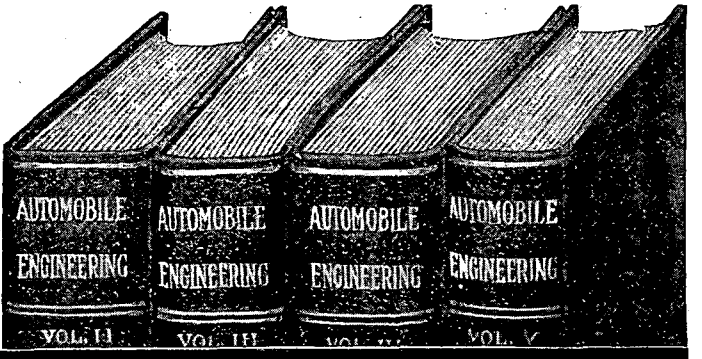

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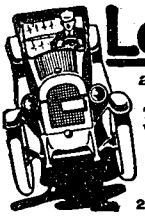

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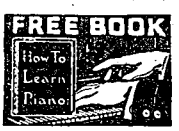

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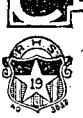

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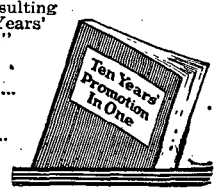

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THE ARGOSY

Vol. CII SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1918 No. 2

Broadname Whispers

by John Boyd Clarke

Author of "The Locked Door," etc.

CHAPTER I.

JOHN BROADNAME IS DYING.

JOHN BROADNAME was dying. He had been dying for hours, and Dr. Alford Prentice, the physician in attendance at his bedside, could have told almost to the minute, he believed, when the president of the Broadname Construction Company would draw his final breath.

Prentice was a dapper little man with a closely trimmed brown beard of the prescribed medical cut, and eyeglasses of such brilliancy that, although aiding his own sight, they hid from the closest observer the expression of the doctor's eyes.

He was niceness itself (as most small men are) in point of linen, the care of his hands and nails, the polish of his shoes, the proper crease to his trousers. No woman could look at him at all without liking him; an observant man might have reserved his decision as to the doctor's character until further acquaintance.

He displayed a certain bruskness of manner which is often the result of the medical practitioner's experience. Dr. Prentice was becoming noted in the operating theater of more than one hospital as a man who feared the attempt of no delicate task in surgery. A certain callousness, if you will, is needed for such work.

Miss Ames, the light-footed, sweet-voiced nurse, whom Prentice had summoned to the case, wondered—as she often did—how the doctor could be so hard. She was attracted to the dapper little physician, as others of her sex were; in addition she had reason to admire his professional ability. But from close association with Prentice she had, perhaps, lost something of that perspective that one should have to justly judge character.

Here, stretched upon his bed, breathing stertorously, lay the man who had been stricken as though by the lightning's bolt. Each labored heart-throb was a drum-beat to his grave; yet it was plain that Dr. Prentice's interest in the patient and in his state was purely professional. He objected

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to the display of any other emotion by those about the sick chamber.

The nurse had some difficulty in restraining her own natural feelings, for a man—whether rich or poor—dying without friends or family to ease his passing moments with their sympathy, is in a pitiful case indeed.

About six in the afternoon the doctor snapped his watchcase shut, dropped the wrist of the dying man, and beckoned the nurse.

"Have that oaf, Lundy Timms, tell the gentlemen below that there is no change, that there is likely to be no change; and that Mr. Broadname has in all probability less than an hour to live."

Felice Ames wiped her eyes covertly. She wished that Prentice had spoken more kindly of Broadname's old servant, whom she knew to be lingering in the hall.

There was no soul to mourn Broadname's death but Lundy Timms. Broadname had given all his time and thought and strength to making money; he could not possibly have given much attention, therefore, to the making of friends who would mourn his demise.

Lundy was as good and soft-hearted a chap as ever stepped. He was a lonely man without family or friends, like his master, and he stood in the hall and sobbed aloud when the nurse gave him the doctor's message.

"Don't—don't Dr. Prentice think there is *any* hope, miss?" he asked, his wrinkled, brown old face working pitifully.

The nurse knew that firmness would be kindness in this case. She shook her pretty head on which the hair was dressed so becomingly, and her blue eyes—the eyes of one that sees far and imagines much—were moist.

"When Dr. Prentice speaks as he does now, Mr. Timms, there is not a particle of hope. I know the doctor so well," she said, a faint blush mantling her cheek and quite glorifying her expression for the moment, "that I assure you Mr. Broadname is really dying."

Lundy bowed his head, wiping his old eyes once again. "The Board of Directors is engaged below, miss. I will report to them immediately," he said, and went away quite as soft-footed as the nurse herself. It would be difficult to make much noise by walking through the halls of Broadname's house. The velvet carpets were of the thickest pile; the rugs were enormously expensive and very heavy.

The house was massively built of brick and stone, though but three stories in height. It stood by the side of the lofty building, the two lower floors of which were devoted entirely to the uses of the Broadname Construction Company. Indeed, the dwelling of the company's founder looked like a wart, or other cutaneous eruption, which had appeared upon the surface of the greater building.

There was a stairway, shut across at the top with a locked, steel-barred gate, leading from the second floor of Broadname's residence down to the directors' room and the magnate's own private office on the main floor of the construction company's offices. The foot of this stairway was beside the massive safe built between the walls of the two buildings, the door of which occupied considerable space at that end of the long and solidly furnished apartment.

There were other safes in the offices—safes where the ledgers, papers, and the working cash of the corporation were kept. But this vault in the directors' room was of much greater importance than any of the other strong-boxes.

In most corporations there are secrets known only to the men who are the controlling officers of the concern. A corporation is known as a thing without a soul; but it has a great memory! In the case of the Broadname Construction Company its secrets and its memories were locked into this safe in the directors' room, and—John Broadname carried the key.

The president of the corporation knew the combination of that safe; but nobody else in the world knew it. When the safe was put in the manufacturers had sent a man to set the combination; but Broadname had sent him packing. He was a mechanic himself; it was his inventive genius in mechanics that had started him upon the road to affluence.

So he set the combination of the lock.

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He had never written the numbers down. He had never whispered them into the ear of his most trusted employee, or revealed them to his closest business associate.

He alone knew how to open that safe without drilling into it and blowing the door off—and, incidentally, blowing the party wall to ruin, and, perhaps, causing serious damage to the superstructure of both buildings. Such burglarious methods, too, must of necessity take time.

All this day, while Broadname lay dying, his associates in the corporation had remained in most anxious conclave. Broadname had been stricken with apoplexy the evening before. His demise had been utterly unexpected and quite unprepared for, for he appeared robust to the layman, and a vigorous man withal, when he sat down to his dinner-table.

The Broadname Construction Company had options on certain properties upon which a system of public buildings was to be erected. How Broadname had obtained advance information of the projected erection of these buildings and their site would make another story. We have nothing to do in this narrative with municipal graft.

Let it suffice that these options had been obtained and that one million eight hundred thousand dollars in bank-notes were now locked into Broadname's safe. The matter was so delicate that John Broadname would not hear of checks being drawn in payment for these properties on which the options had been secured.

Most of the options had until noon of the next day but one to run, and had John Broadname not been stricken the owners of the aforesaid properties would have been called to the offices of several attorneys on this day, or the next morning, to sign contracts and get their money.

Every arrangement had been made to record the deeds before the city commission publicly announced its choice of site and time of building. It would be a great coup—if it went through; one of the greatest that John Broadname had ever engineered.

It had been no small task to get together so great an amount of hard cash. Owing to several commercial changes brought about—as everything else seems to be influenced—by the war, the very existence of the construction company and the personal credit of its directors were involved in this affair. The concern stood to lose much more than the profit expected on the options.

Even the eighteen hundred thousand dollars now locked into the vault—at the door of which the board, as a body, had been staring for most of this anxious day—would scarcely save the company from disruption, and most of the directors themselves from absolute bankruptcy. Personal and communal credit had been strained to the breaking point for this big deal.

The board had been just as hungry for the "killing" as was Broadname — previous to his dinner-hour the evening before. Since he had fallen from his chair and Lundy Timms caught him in his arms, Broadname had been interested (seemingly) in nothing on earth.

He had lain flat upon his bed, his eyes open, with the pupils rolled toward the frescoed ceiling, sometimes picking at the counterpane with fingers already stiffened by approaching dissolution, but apparently knowing nobody and realizing nothing of what went on about him.

The vice-president, the secretary, the assistant treasurer, and other members of the board, had tiptoed into the room and asked Dr. Prentice for exact information. The physician had said to all:

"I do not know."

That was a medical evasion. He did know. He had known it from the first examination of the patient. And now he sent down word to those anxious and money-hungry men that, in an hour, John Broadname would be no more.

The nurse returned to the great chamber in which the dying man lay, and found the physician pacing the floor with short, nervous steps. She appreciated his mental state, for she had closely watched him for months. Almost daily they had come in contact—either on private cases or in the hospital wards or operating-room.

The man was overworked; he did not turn to either drugs or alcohol to stimulate his nerves and body. Had Broadname de-

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layed his illness twenty-four hours, Dr. Prentice would have been on his way to the Adirondack woods for a much-needed vacation. His practise was already in the hands of a brother practitioner. The impatient glance he now cast at the bed gave Felice Ames a clear understanding of the physician's thoughts—and she shuddered.

With all the attraction the medical man had for her, his bruskness and callousness made him at times almost repulsive. She could not understand a man of Dr. Prentice's natural refinement and keen susceptibilities in other ways possessing so broad a streak of coarseness. She was often shocked by exhibitions of it.

There was another fault—a serious one, too, in Miss Ames's opinion—in the doctor's character. Like many men, especially in his own profession or those similarly exacting, Dr. Prentice demanded a certain reaction from his duties—he needed excitement. And that excitement she had recently learned he obtained in a way Felice Ames could not approve.

"I wish this business was over," the doctor said to the nurse in his usual matter-of-fact way. "I want to get away early in the morning. I can do no more good here than a deaf-and-dumb man in a church choir. It's a beastly bore!"

With that man lying on the bed within hearing of the physician, this speech troubled Miss Ames. She was rearranging the glasses and bottles on the tabouret at the head of the bed, and her trembling fingers jingled the glasses.

"Hel-*lo!*" ejaculated Dr. Prentice with a quizzical look at her. "You're in need of something for your nerves, too, I fancy. A trip into the woods would do you no harm, my dear!"

"Perhaps not," she admitted, her face most grave and shaking her head. "But such joys are not for me—especially at present."

"Humph!" muttered the doctor. "More trouble at home?"

She nodded, but tightened the line of her lips, which were well colored but not full. The doctor's "humph!" did not encourage her to say more. She already knew *his* opinion of certain of her domestic affairs.

Yet he plainly approved of Felice Ames in every other particular. He was more than satisfied with her work. It would be hard to say if Alford Prentice would ever have any deeper feeling for a woman than he had for this sweet-faced, gentle-mannered nurse. He was student enough of humanity to realize that the girl, too, felt more than a common interest in him.—

Yet she held herself in check. Up to a certain point she was friendly—friendly in a sisterly way — and Prentice appreciated the fact that her modesty and good sense raised the barrier between them in their professional associations that he thoroughly approved. His experience with other nurses at times had been different.

He sometimes wondered if he would not be wise to make an honest—as honest as he could—declaration to Felice Ames, and stand by her decision? It was a general belief among men of his class in the profession that a wife was a drag rather than a help.

Prentice had never dreamed of marrying money. Many young practitioners do, without much thought as to what the money may bring with it. And he was quite as needy as are most younger members of the medical profession. Successful as he was, fame more than ducats had thus far paid him for his hard work and study.

He was no "lady's man"—was not usually attracted by, no matter how much he might attract, the sex—and his opportunities to meet women out of the sick room, or hospital ward and operating-room had been few.

There was a barrier, too. Despite the fact of her frankly expressed interest in Dr. Alford Prentice, he somehow felt, if he asked her, she would refuse to marry him.

He liked her. She puzzled him. And he was annoyed.

CHAPTER II.

JOHN BROADNAME DIES.

HAD Dr. Prentice given the directors in the first place to understand that the president of the Broadname Construction Company could not rally, they would have

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been clamoring all day at the chamber door in an attempt to " rouse " the stricken man.

As well might they go to the churchyard and clamor at the door of the tomb of the man already crumbled to clay in his coffin! Such was Dr. Prentice's belief.

John Broadname was already dead. Merely he had not ceased to breathe.

So the announcement of the weeping Lundy Timms that his master's dissolution was so close really startled the directors. They had been fighting all day to ignore the possibility of his dying without speech —without recognizing them—without telling them the combination of that safe.

Lacking such knowledge, how were they to get hold of the cash and the options and close the deal ere the time-limit ran out—at noon of the day but one following?

The company had many irons in the fire. While its president was at the head of affairs he could " swing " everything all right. Men and business concerns had every confidence in John Broadname. He had been " pulling off " big things for years, and almost any man on the Street would be willing—indeed glad—to go into a blind pool with the head of the construction company.

But these directors were timid men. Among them was no one man really big enough to take Broadname's place. He had not been willing to have associated with him men of equal force of character and virility. He had chosen for his associates on the board only such as he could dominate.

In securing this kind of timber he naturally had to take men of small caliber, more or less; men without the ability or courage to lead, but who were avaricious and not too squeamish of morals. The members of the board all knew Broadname's plans regarding the options, and any one of them could have taken hold of the matter and carried it to successful completion on the lines already laid down by Broadname himself. But they could not deviate an iota from the plan of the master-mind and be sure of completing the scheme.

So the chance that had locked eighteen hundred thousand dollars and the options into that safe, with no means of properly and easily opening it before the time most of the options expired, filled every little, shrinking soul around that directors' table with positive terror.

Any tears for the dying Broadname? Only in poor Lundy Timms's eyes.

Had these men really felt affection for the president of the corporation they would have forgotten it in this time of apprehension. It is the little, cowardly soul that is the most cruel.

They had no compunctions of conscience when they filed up, three of them as a committee, to disturb the last moments of the dying man. Dr. Prentice glanced with a scornful grimace at their smug but troubled faces and saw that this was no visit of condolence.

" Dr. Prentice," said Harlan Stiebold, the vice-president, " is there no possibility of rousing Mr. Broadname before the end?"

" I do not know," retorted Prentice.

" Will you try to rouse him?"

" To what end?" demanded the physician, with raised eyebrows.

Stiebold explained the difficulty briefly. They must know the combination of that safe before Broadname died.

" Is there no drug you might prescribe that would rouse his faculties even for the briefest time?"

" I know of nothing that would not shorten the remaining span of his life," grunted Prentice.

" But man! This is of the utmost importance," cried Stiebold. " We have *got* to know that combination."

" Have the safe broken open."

" It is doubtful if even we could do *that* in season," murmured one of the other visitors.

" We must attempt to arouse him," declared Stiebold, emphatically.

" You want me practically to kill the man, do you?" said the doctor, gruffly, and eying them with strong disfavor expressed in his keen, lean face.

" Tut, tut, doctor!" cried the vice-president. " Such a statement is ridiculous."

" To shorten his time here is murder," declared Prentice doggedly.

" But, doctor—"

Prentice rose and moved abruptly from the bedside.

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"I wash my hands of it," he said, with determination. "I will have nothing to do with any such experiment. To attempt to rouse the patient is against my professional advice and I will not be a party to it. You gentlemen may do what you like; you may even call another physician—"

"Nonsense, Dr. Prentice!" cried Stiebold, in haste. "Nobody would want a better doctor than yourself."

"Perhaps not," said Prentice, grimly. "But you may find another who would be willing to help you. However, you must work quickly, for I tell you that Mr. Broadname is now almost at his last gasp."

A groan in chorus from the three anxious men—an involuntary expression of their worriment of mind—met this announcement. They began to stammer their fears.

"We *must* do something." "Nobody has the least idea what the combination is like." "It is positive that Mr. Broadname never confided it to a soul."

Prentice was watching them again with the hard smile on his face.

"You gentlemen can do as you like," he repeated. "He has no family to object."

He left them and joined Miss Ames at the farther end of the long room. He noted in one keen, quick glance, that she was feeling the tension of the scene. For the first time the doctor showed feeling—that "human touch" that he prided himself upon having quelled long before in his hospital career.

"You would better retire for a little," he said, in his usual voice. "These fellows will not be long. They will soon be satisfied."

"Oh! It is terrible, doctor," she murmured, with clasped hands, her eyes drowned in unshed tears. "Is—is it necessary?"

"Not at all."

"Can't—can't you stop it, doctor!"

"I do not know that I can," replied Prentice, in the same tone. "I do not know that I have a right to. It is positive that they can do little harm—little harm."

"But it is awful to have that poor creature disturbed. Common decency—"

Dr. Prentice's laugh was harsh, though his tone was still low.

"I always said, Miss Ames, that you had one fault as a nurse, and only one," he observed. "You are too tender-hearted. You will wear yourself out in this profession. Come, my dear, suppose you go into the other room?"

"But—but will they rouse him?" she whispered.

"Not a chance!"

He patted her on the shoulder and held open the door between the chamber and Broadname's sitting-room—and did it more in command than courtesy. He had himself quite in hand again as she went out, her handkerchief to her eyes. She thanked him in a whisper and Prentice nodded, with pursed lips.

Meanwhile the dying man lay breathing stertorously, his unwinking eyes fixed on the ceiling. Those who stood about his bed spoke of him as though he had no consciousness (as he had not), no feeling, no real existence!

The committee of three looked at each other. Then the two looked at Stiebold. *He* was elected in that moment to do the gruesome work.

He was an arrant coward, but his money was at stake. A rat will fight when cornered and the vice-president of the construction company was a ratlike man. He leaned over the dying Broadname and suddenly seized him by his bulky shoulders and actually shook him!

"Broadname! John! Do you hear me?" he cried hoarsely.

Prentice at the distant window looking out into the gathering dusk, shivered in spite of himself. Used to death-bed scenes and calloused as he was to many forms of human suffering, he found that he had "nerves." He knew just how corpselike the face on the pillow looked. The eyes were rolled upward, the expression frozen. He did not believe that anything Stiebold could say would penetrate to that clouded brain.

"Mr. Broadname!" chattered the vice-president and once more shook the heavy shoulders of the man on the bed. "Listen! We must know the safe combination. We *must* know it—understand? *The safe combination.*"

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The three watched that dead face for some sign of attention—for some flicker of eyelash even, that might show the demand had been heard. Their own countenances were pallid and they scarcely breathed. One man had to clench his hands together tightly to keep from screaming.

There was no movement from the bed—not the slightest. The stertorous breathing was unabated.

Stiebold let the shoulders drop back and cursed heartily. He was a desperately coarse man when stirred to any depth, and now he was roiled to the very bottom of his muddy soul.

"My God! We're ruined!" sobbed the man who had wrung his hands.

John Broadname paid no heed to their demands, nor was he troubled by their trouble. He attended strictly to his own business, which was the business of dying.

He had considered very little the welfare of his associates in life; he certainly showed no interest in their panic now.

Suddenly the listening Prentice stepped swiftly to the bedside.

"You have done enough, gentlemen," he said, bruskly. "You have brought about a change."

The labored breathing of the man on the bed was lighter and more broken. A strange, uncertain rattling came from his throat.

"Ah! He will come to," cried Stiebold, hopefully. "Will he speak?"

Prentice had the patient's pulse under his fingers again. The breathing grew slower and slower. The committee could scarcely restrain its impatience and Stiebold, his little eyes glittering, licked his lips.

"Is he going to know us?" he whispered again, shrilly.

Prentice turned and angrily waved them away with his disengaged hand.

"Not in this world," he snapped. "Don't you see that you have *done* for him? He is dead!"

The sound of the breathing ceased. The eyes remained fixed. There was yet a faint color in the cheeks, but there was a stillness to the form beneath the coverings that could mean but one thing.

Even these directors were shocked at last. The two drew away from Stiebold, looking at him askance.

"You can go, gentlemen," said Prentice, tartly, dropping the wrist. "If you learned nothing from Mr. Broadname before, you certainly will learn nothing now."

He sat down at the bedside again, leisurely took the stethoscope from his pocket and adjusted it over the heart of the body on the bed. He was listening perfunctorily with the tubes in his ears when the three men, like three whipped curs, slunk from the room.

CHAPTER III.

THE VOICE OF THE DEAD.

IT was in Prentice's mind to call Miss Ames. She would do those things that were necessary, remove the glasses and bottles, wash his instruments, and tidy the room—waiting also till the undertaker should come. The doctor was already wondering if he had a death certificate in his wallet.

He glanced up to see Lundy Timms standing at the foot of the bed where the three associates of John Broadname had so recently cowered, the tears rolling silently down the old man's cheeks.

"Well?" snapped the doctor in an irritated tone.

"Is Mr. Broadname no more, sir? Is he really dead?" whispered the serving man.

"Ye—wait! Don't waste all your tears my man," the doctor said grimly, his gaze fastened on the dead face against the pillow. "Wait. That's odd. I could have sworn there was not a stir there," muttered the physician, bending his brows. "But—but—no! he is not dead yet. At least, his heart has not ceased entirely to beat."

He flung down the stethoscope and stooped until his ear almost touched the lips of the man on the bed.

"H-m! No. He's not breathed his last yet," he murmured.

Frankly he was puzzled. He had been positive the minute before that Broadname was no longer alive. The cessation of the labored breathing should have announced the demise of the stricken man. But life

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remained. Prentice glanced up again and shook his head at Lundy Timms.

"Not yet," he repeated.

"Shall I call the gentlemen back?" asked the valet.

"No! Not unless you want the man's breath completely harried out of his body," growled Prentice.

The valet silently withdrew out of range of the physician's vision. The latter got nervously to his own feet and began to pace the room again. There was no hope for the man lying there on the bed, and without hope for results how can the medical man—of Prentice's class—retain interest in his case?

He finally stepped into the hall just as Miss Ames entered from the small sitting-room at the rear of the chamber. She came curiously forward to glance at the man whom she supposed already dead. She could not understand why the doctor had left the room and not called her—

The nurse's train of thought was sharply—aye, startlingly—broken. There was a movement of the man on the bed. She went quickly around to the side of the broad couch to peer closer into the fixed features of John Broadname.

Not daring to believe her sight she stepped to the near-by window (which looked out upon a sheltered yard) and snapped up the shade. The fading twilight fell across the face on the pillow, adding if anything to its ghastly look.

The window-sash was down from the top a little, and a wandering breeze—a mere breath, for it was a sultry evening—fluttered the hangings gently. The thickly leaved tree, the branches of which brushed the house, rustled in the soughing wind.

The slight flush in the cheeks of the man on the bed had disappeared entirely and now the face was gray and waxlike. But the eyes had changed in their glassy stare.

The pupils had lost their fixed look. There was some fire in them and they were no longer rolled upward. Some emotion was being born again into the poor, dulled brain. There was life there yet.

It was as impossible that the man should fully come back to existence—conscious existence—as that a buried corpse should do so. But his vital force was making a desperate struggle for expression.

As a man suffering under an apoplectic stroke John Broadname should, by rights, be already dead. At least, there should not have been this lingering between life and death—this hanging seemingly by a hair over the pit of the infinite unknown. When his stertorous breathing ceased the man should have been instantly dead.

Instead, here was an intense struggle going on—a grim fight between the man's vital forces and Death. The face on the pillow grew slightly contorted. The brow corrugated into a deeper frown. Then the lips began to twitch as though they, and the stiffened tongue, sought to utter audible sounds.

The nurse looked on entranced, the horror of this more-than-mortal change holding her moveless by the bedside. Even a slight noise outside the window did not gain her attention, although she heard it. It might have been nothing but the continued rustling of the tree branches against the house.

Nurse Ames was enthralled by the struggle of this practically dead man to return to life. The pain, the mental agony, the mad desire of the benumbed spirit once again—and only once—to express itself, made a swift appeal to the tender sensibilities of the nurse; whereas Dr. Prentice, had he been here, would merely have been interested in the scientific phase of the incident. It would have made an excellent note for the *Medical Journal*—and the doctor liked to see his name in print.

Without the doctor's exact knowledge of medical phenomena, Felice Ames watched the twitching lips writhe and mouth and seem to try to form broken, stammering syllables. The muscles of the body began to stiffen. A quiver shot through the dying man's frame.

And then—the nurse staggered back, hand gripping hand in her horror of the scene—John Broadname spoke!

The sound was gruesome, shocking, most horrible! It was not a human voice. It owned no life, no tone, no rhythm. It was a dead sound falling flat upon the air of the chamber as though a corpse had actually spoken.

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And these sounds—this speech? Were they really words the departing spirit of John Broadname forced through his already stiffened lips. The nurse crouched against the post of the bed, wringing her hands in silent terror, scarcely at first apprehending the words:

"Six—teen—two—"

Words they certainly were; at least, they were distinguishable syllables, haltingly, as they were brought forth in this travail of the dying man. The demands of his confrères, who had so selfishly dragged him back from the very shore of death, was bearing fruit. The words of Harlan Stiebold had penetrated the stagnant brain; *John Broadname had heard and understood.*

His once-teeming brain, so stricken by the paralyzing touch of Death, had responded to the roweling of his fellow schemers. It had been recalled to its duty. In some mysterious way, perhaps almost mechanically, the dying brain knew that it had not fulfilled some last command of its dying master.

The desire was to make the combination of the safe known. Back from the verge of the river, the chill waters of which already lapped John Broadname's heart, the man's spirit had returned to command that brain and tongue—to perform this last task.

Would tongue and brain obey? Would the superhuman task be intelligibly performed?

The nurse regained her voice at last. A cry broke from her own lips. She staggered away from the bed, her hands outstretched, seeking the hall where she supposed the doctor and Lundy Timms to be.

"Doctor! Doctor!" she gasped.

"Yes?" His voice halted her—not alone because of its perfect evenness of tone, but because it sounded behind her. He had opened the door of the sitting-room and looked in.

She flew to him. "He—he spoke! He is alive!" the nurse said and clung to the doctor for a moment in utter and helpless terror.

Somehow—and from somewhere—Lundy Timms appeared beside her, too. "There! there!" said Dr. Prentice in his most professional tone. "What did he say? You are overwrought, Miss Ames. Take her away, Timms."

Felice Ames shrank from him a little. "What did he say?" the doctor asked again.

"I—I—don't know—I don't remember," she breathed, going with the valet into the inner room, while Dr. Prentice approached the bed.

He scrutinized the face against the pillow steadily. The eyeballs gleamed in a frozen stare once more—the orbs of a dead man!

Prentice pulled down the sheet and placed a hand upon the bare flesh of the body over the heart. It was already chilled. He affixed the stethoscope again. He bent an inquiring ear to his lips. He even held a little pocket mirror before them to catch any moisture that might be exuded from the lungs.

There was none. There was no further sound. There was no heaving of the chest. The spirit and body had been rent asunder in that final effort. John Broadname had at last died.

There was a repetition of the sound the nurse had failed to notice outside the window. The doctor glanced up, puzzled; then stepped swiftly to the casement, flung up both sashes, and looked out. It was dusky now in the tree-top, and there appeared to be nothing there to make the sound but the tree branches. Yet it seemed an almost breathless night.

"I—I—well! This thing has got on my nerves, too," muttered Dr. Alford Prentice. "I could have sworn somebody was out there."

He flirted the sheet over the dead man's face, passed on to the cellaret, and pouring himself a stiff drink from the decanter, swallowed it, and then once again left the room.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WATCHMAKER.

MR. PERRITON BROOKS was sitting in the shop door one evening playing with a fox-terrier pup three or four weeks old—a lively, perky little fellow—when a

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nondescript individual slouched along the walk and halted opposite the watchmaker to look at the pup's antics.

"Fine dawg that, boss," he observed, in a voice that had evidently slept out frequently on park benches. "Ye want his tail docked, don't ye? I'll bite it off fer ye fer seventy-five cents."

"I suppose he would have eaten the whole dog for a dollar," Brooks observed to Ben Littell who sat smoking beside him, when the man had passed along.

Which merely points the fact men will do strange things for money, or for a livelihood; and Brooks's own friends had often expressed surprise that he should attempt to follow the trade of watchmaker, when so many other opportunities were his as a young man.

Not that he was an old man now, despite the gray above his temples and the wrinkles about his eyes. He was a middle-sized, quiet, observant man with a "listening" countenance. Even strangers liked Perriton Brooks because he seemed to give them all his attention in the most trivial matter.

It was one of Brooks's favorite sayings, however, "There are no trivial matters." Again, he held that it doesn't matter so much what a man does in this world, as long as he discovers the thing he can do best and pays strict attention to it.

As a boy he always wanted to take a toy apart to find out "what made the wheels go round."

He was six years old when he dismembered his first clock—and a handsome thrashing he got from his old grandfather for it, too.

It is easy to be a tearer-down; it means something to be able to build up. Brooks's grandfather stood over him with a strap and ordered him to put the clock together again, and the boy found—much to his surprise and not a little to his pain—that he could not do it.

That circumstances did not quench young Brooks's spirit of investigation. Rather, it piqued it. But he was careful thereafter to look well toward the putting together of a thing before he pulled it apart. So Perriton Brooks had gone through life—thus far—scrutinizing the mysteries of existence, philosophical as well as mechanical mysteries. And, having begun with clocks, he was likely to end with them.

He did not do well in school for a while and his parents took him to Europe. He ran away to Berne and worked for some months with a watchmaker there—a master of his art. He learned a deal from him; much about his trade, however, he picked up afterward. There are few watchmakers in America to-day, for the parts of watches are now made by machinery.

A watchmaker's fingers must necessarily be dexterous; Brooks cultivated his ear as well. Some men in the business can tell you by listening to the movement of a timepiece whether it needs cleaning, or what small trouble may be the matter inside the case. But Perriton Brooks could tell by listening to the movement of a watch what make it was; that is, if he had previous knowledge of that particular manufacture of timepiece.

His trend of mind was toward investigation of the slightest puzzling circumstances —either in mechanics, or in life itself.

From puzzling over the mechanism of watches and other delicate machinery, he naturally came to be interested in all manner of riddles. In his college days Brooks learned to reason inductively; and he put that logic into practical use by explaining, to the delight and surprise of his friends, a mysterious occurrence which had the whole college by the ears.

Concentration of mind upon a complicated piece of mechanism he claimed to be strengthening and inspiring to the brain. If one can closely apply oneself to the solution of a mechanical problem, one must naturally learn thereby to analyze more clearly and surely actual problems of life. This was the creed of Perriton Brooks, watchmaker.

His friends had grown to bring to his attention such little mysteries and puzzles as might interest them. Now and then he did something in the field of criminology; but more for his own entertainment, or that of his friends, than in a serious mood. He was not a detective; not even a "private investigator." What he did was without beat of drums, or clash of cymbals.

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He held with Poe, in his solution of the mystery of Mary Rogers ("The Mystery of Marie Roget") that if one is too close to the scene of a happening, one is often confused by apparently conflicting bits of evidence which, seen in proper perspective, would fall logically into place. Therefore, when most urgently asked to take an active and personal part in the investigation of any problem brought to his notice, Perriton Brooks was wont to refuse even to visit the scene of the happening.

But there was no crime hinted at—at least, no immediate crime—in the matter that Mr. Theophilus Cramm brought to Brooks's attention early one morning.

Cramm was an old acquaintance; he was frequently in the watchmaker's shop; and Brooks agreed to visit the offices of the corporation of which Cramm was assistant treasurer when he phoned that there was something the matter with a safe there—a safe which he and his fellow directors were particularly anxious to open. The only man who knew its combination had suddenly died, and it was very necessary that the strong-box should be entered at once.

From what Mr. Cramm told Brooks over the phone (and he seemed very much excited) the latter gathered that there had been experts working most of the night upon the lock without result. The directors were even then (at the time Cramm phoned) expecting a professional safe-breaker—a convict, or ex-convict—to try his hand on the lock; Cramm did not seem to have much confidence in the ability of this fellow.

It was not desired to blow open the strong-box. Much damage might be done to the building; and Cramm said the experts thought it might take forty-eight hours to drill through the steel plates. It was absolutely necessary that the contents of the vault should be got at before noon of the next day.

Now, Perriton Brooks was a watchmaker; he was no safe expert; and he pointed out this fact to Mr. Cramm. But a little thing that had occurred within Cramm's knowledge suggested to him that Brooks might be able to study out the combination and so open the safe.

Really, the matter interested Brooks but slightly and he might, after all, have refused Cramm's request had it not been for a visitor who called on the watchmaker that morning as early as breakfast time.

Brooks said: "That is the way it goes in this world of ours; one thing dovetails with another; seemingly entirely unconnected matters are really related; life is a complex web of coincidences, and we are caught in it!"

The watchmaker lived over his shop; his household arrangements were as follows:

Being a bachelor and without immediate family, his only associates in the house, aside from the old housekeeper and the two maid servants, were Snaggs—Jim Snaggs—his shopman, and Ben Littell.

Ben was some years the junior of Perriton Brooks, but he was a freshman at college when Brooks was a tardy senior, and for some occult reason Ben had conceived a strong and abiding liking for the watchmaker. Being wealthy and footloose he spent a good portion of his time with Brooks.

The house was one of the old brownstone-front affairs, four stories and basement, to be found not infrequently on the more quiet streets of the East Side, downtown.

Brooks had put a shop-front into the basement, used the room behind for a breakfast and sitting-room, and managed to occupy the whole house in one way or another. His father had left him the property, and he could afford to keep up this rather expensive ménage—though not on the profits from his shop!

They were at breakfast—the watchmaker, his clerk, and Littell—when the maid came down with a card. "A lady to see you, Mr. Brooks," she said, placing the card beside her master's plate.

"They're beginning on you early this morning, old man," chaffed the irreverent Ben, with his mouth full of hot muffin.

Brooks flipped the card across to him as he rose from his seat.

"More in your line, I think, Bennie," he said, and left his friend reading the name engraved on the card with an astonished look and cheeks that burned suddenly.

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Littell was a handsome, athletic, yellow-haired chap, with a pink-and-white complexion and a good deal of the playfulness —and some of the stupidity—of a Newfoundland pup.

Of a good Boston family, he was counted a catch by certain match-making mammas. But with all his good-nature and denseness, he was shrewd enough to have escaped the wiles of the dowager dragons of the Hub. He held in his hand at that moment, however, the card of the girl above all others in whom Brooks knew him to be truly interested.

She wrote her name "Caroline Dwight Perrin," and she was likewise of Boston extraction—two facts that might lead one to expect something in the line of blue-stocking.

Brooks had gathered from Littell that Miss Perrin was very erudite—that she was highly educated, indeed extremely cultured, and dabbled in most of the isms that have broken out like a public rash on the Boston body-politic during the past four or five years.

Despite the fact that the enamored young man declared her to possess some considerable personal pulchritude. Brooks was a good deal astonished when he entered the reception-room into which the maid had shown the unexpected visitor.

She was sitting near the window, and the watchmaker heard the *tap, tap, tap* of a nervous foot before he saw her. The morning sunlight fell around her like a golden mantle, and its brilliancy would have tried many women—many pretty women, indeed. But although her figure was a bit plump and overfull, her face could afford the searching of sunlight as well as any face Perriton Brooks had ever gazed upon.

There was no blemish in the dark, rosy skin; her cheeks were delightfully round and dimpled and the violet eyes held a most enticing fire in their depths. No matter how serious she might at the moment be, Caroline Perrin's bowed lips seemed on the verge of parting in a winsome smile.

Altogether, she was entirely different in appearance from his preconceived idea and this discovery perplexed Perriton Brooks quite as much as did her presence at this hour in his reception-room.

She rose when she heard him enter and made a most charming picture there in the sunshine as Brooks advanced to greet her. Her plump little hand and wrist were neatly gloved, just as her trim little foot was well shod. She was the sort of a girl on whom a tailor-made suit looks more attractive than a Paquin conception upon many of her sisters.

"Mr. Brooks?" she queried and her voice was on a par with her looks.

Altogether the watchmaker did not blame Ben Littell for being so deeply interested in her and was sorry that Miss Caroline Dwight Perrin had long since refused to consider his friend seriously as a lover. But he was curious to learn her business with him and the watchmaker admitted his identity with an expression of countenance that probably betrayed his wonder.

"You are surprised that I call upon you, Mr. Brooks—and at so unseasonable an hour?" she said, softly. "But I know you have heard of me from Mr. Littell."

"You are quite right on both points," the watchmaker said, smiling in his grave way. "Ben has often spoken of you."

Her dark face flushed and her eyes were hidden from his scrutiny for a moment. He thought, too, that the long lashes glistened as though there were tear-drops upon them and his wonder grew. But she gave him little time to thus contemplate her.

"I hope you will not consider me a nuisance, Mr. Brooks; but Mr. Littell is not the only person who has told me about you —about your keenness of perception and your—er—"

"Horse sense?" he suggested, dryly.

"Perhaps!" and she laughed suddenly, her eyes dancing.

"I am loath to accuse you of flattery, Miss Perrin," Brooks retorted and she grew immediately serious when she saw he was not pleased.

Yet she still looked up at him like a saucy bird with its head aside and declared it was Ben's fault if he were offended.

"Ben has told me so much about you, Mr. Brooks; I believe you are the one person in the world who can help me."

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"Deliver us from our friends!" muttered Brooks, piously. But fearing that it might sound churlish, he hastened to add aloud: "I should thank Ben, then, for his fulsome praise if it has led to your calling upon me. And what is the nature of your trouble, Miss Perrin?"

The watchmaker quickly discovered the reason for his friend's enthusiastic approval of Miss Perrin's intelligence. She got directly at the heart of her subject and interested Brooks in her story within the first hundred and twenty seconds. But he stopped her at that point.

"Wait," he begged. "Do you mind if I call Mr. Littell? He is here this morning and he possibly knows these people of whom you speak much better than I do. Do you object to taking him—as well as me—into your confidence?"

He put it in a way sure to bring an affirmative answer — perhaps intentionally. With heightened color she said:

"Not at all. I do not know that Mr. Littell can help me; but I do not mind his hearing the story, for I know him to be the soul of honor."

"I am sure that would delight Ben if he knew it were your opinion," Brooks observed, seriously, ringing for the maid.

"Then I hope you will not tell him, Mr. Brooks," she said, quickly.

"No?"

"Mr. Littell is not a young man who needs encouragement," she retorted, demurely, and the smile hovered upon her lips again.

Brooks was no match-maker—*that* was a matter a little too complicated even for him! He judged, besides, that this very self-contained young woman was likely to know her own mind better than anybody could know it for her.

So he made no comment upon her last words and they sat in silence until Ben came, in the wake of the maid. The greeting between him and Miss Perrin was rather strained; but the girl was straightforward by nature and at present very much in earnest; so she did not allow any natural confusion she might feel to sidetrack her story.

"Listen to what Miss Perrin has to say, Ben," said the watchmaker to relieve the embarrassing pause. "You know the men at the head of the Broadname Construction Company. I am only acquainted with Mr. Theophilus Cramm, myself."

"Jove! John Broadname's company?" ejaculated Ben, startled. "Why, he died last evening—shocking affair. It was all over the club."

Brooks was looking, as was his friend, at their visitor. A sudden pallor quenched the roses in her cheeks and her eyes opened widely, their expression startled and afraid.

"Oh, Mr. Littell!" she murmured. "Dead?"

"Yes. Ill only twenty-four hours. Sudden—very."

The look of fear melted from her countenance, but she was very pale and grave as Ben repeated briefly the particulars of the well-known man's end.

"Has your trouble to do with him?" Ben asked, in conclusion.

"Oh, it has—it has, indeed!" she cried, nervously clasping and unclasping her hands. "It has to deal with him and that bad, *bad* concern of which he was the head."

"You are warm, Miss Caro," he declared. "I don't know just what you mean by calling Broadname's company a bad concern. But he owned it. And I shouldn't be surprised if it soon tumbled to ruin, now that he is gone—if *that* is any satisfaction to your mind. The other men in it — Stiebold, Van Geiger, Cramm — Pooh! They haven't John Broadname's brains."

"And without his brains you think the iniquitous partnership may dissolve?" she eagerly demanded.

Her color returned and her eyes again sparkled. Brooks interfered.

"You are breeding a false hope in Miss Perrin's mind, Ben," he admonished. "The concern will not break up at once!"

"Why — no! I didn't mean that it would do so immediately. The bunch Broadname got into that corporation have too good an opinion of themselves either to sell out or dissolve. And I was told last night—on pretty good authority, too—that Broadname had left behind him completed

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plans for pulling off a deal that would clean up a handsome penny for all hands.

"Broadname personally owned several politicians, you know; he made them what they are; so his corporation skimmed the cream of all the city building contracts. There is a big thing in the offing that Broadname's death will probably not affect in the least."

"The man—dead though he be—was a cold-blooded, heartless tyrant!" cried the girl hotly.

Ben smiled a little whimsically. "I've heard you talk about Nero, and Czar Peter, and various other tough old characters of history, in the same terms," he observed.

But this brought no answering smile to her lips. "This scheme he had in hand prior to his death will be carried through by his accomplices?"

"I presume so—though you're putting it rather strongly, aren't you? 'Accomplices,' no less! They are none of them averse to making money."

"Then I am not sorry I spoke so harshly of a dead man," burst out Caro Perrin. "He has broken an old woman's heart; he has ruined a young man's career."

She struggled to suppress her sobs, but the tears gushed suddenly from her eyes.

"And—and I don't know but he—he will do something dreadful because of John Broadname's wicked, wicked trick!" she finally gasped.

Then her hands covered her eyes and her shoulders shook with the gust of weeping that conquered her.

CHAPTER V.

THE STRUGGLES OF JIMMY SMITH.

IT is not a pleasant experience to sit helpless and see a woman cry.

There is but one known male method of hushing the sobs of the female in distress, and under the circumstances Brooks did not feel that that method on *his* part would be welcomed by Caro Perrin; he was too wise to give Ben an opportunity to try it by leaving the room.

Instead, the watchmaker pulled the bell for the maid. Miss Perrin realized this, and dabbled her eyes and hushed her sobs instantly, when she heard the girl's light step. Brooks sent Mary for a glass of water, Ben received it at the door and carried it to the visitor, and in a moment she had thanked them both tremulously, and smiled.

"There! I guess I feel better now," she said. "You don't know what a relief it is to a woman—*any* woman—sometimes to cry. Though I'm not one of the 'weeping sisterhood,' I hope."

There was one fact both of her listeners noted. Caro Perrin was a woman who could cry and not make her nose red!

But neither the watchmaker nor Littell mentioned this discovery and she returned to her narrative promptly, looking directly at Ben as she asked:

"You surely remember Jimmy Smith? He was in your class at Harvard."

Ben's countenance immediately became grim; that fact was not lost upon the watchmaker. But the caller did not seem to notice it as she continued:

"Jimmy and I were pals when we were kiddies at primary school. He was never a very strong boy. You remember, Mr. Littell, that he could not do much in athletics; but he always went to the games and rooted. Jimmy is a loyal soul."

She glanced up, then, and caught the expression in Ben's face and understood it—better than Brooks did, without doubt. She grew quite tart.

"Jimmy was no sissy-boy, I'd have you know, Mr. Brooks," she exclaimed, emphatically; but she looked at Ben and he stammered in response:

"Er—no. I could not say he was. You know, I never knew Mr. Smith well enough to say anything but 'howdy' to him."

"He wasn't your kind; he was studious," she said, still keenly feeling Ben's unspoken criticism. "You knew we were engaged, Mr. Littell?"

"I—er—I *feared* as much," admitted Ben, gloomily.

She flushed again warmly and her eyes sparked at his lack of tact.

"You never appreciated Jimmy's qualities of mind and heart, sir. I know them. We were engaged to be married. He

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hoped to obtain a professorship, but his health broke down immediately after his graduation.

"He is a poor man, Mr. Brooks," she continued, ignoring Ben completely at this point. "It cost him—and his widowed mother—every sacrifice to get him through college. And on the brink of his obtaining recognition for his years of study and hardship, the doctors told him he must give it all up and go away."

"That *was* rough," murmured Ben, but she did not acknowledge the remark by any sign.

"It was death to remain; it was all but starvation for his mother if he went away."

"Why didn't he look up some of the boys?" demanded Littell, with ready sympathy. "There are half a hundred who could—and would—have been glad to help him."

She flushed then and turned on Ben once more.

"Why don't you ask why *I* did not help him? I was his promised wife, and I have money of my own. I'll tell you why," she went on quickly. *"Jimmy Smith isn't that kind of a man.* He would not be beholden to a woman. Nor would he beg from anybody."

"And his poor mother is as proud as he. They own a little house and a bit of land here in New York. All the time Jimmy was in college they leased this property, and Mrs. Smith lived in Cambridge with Jimmy and watched over his health as well as she could.

"But their little property here in New York was in sad repair when the tenant moved out at the end of Jimmy's college course. The Tenement House Department forced them to make some repairs, and they came to live in it themselves meanwhile.

"Then Jimmy fell in with John Broadname. Broadname could use Jimmy. He told him so and told him how.

"The doctors said that Jimmy needed a tropical climate—at least, a voyage into the tropics—and Broadname hired him to go to South America to look into some asphalt claims he had bought. He did not offer Jimmy a salary; but he agreed to get Jimmy some money on a mortgage on his mother's property, and to pay him a percentage on the value of any asphalt beds he might locate.

"Part of the money secured on the mortgage paid for the repairs on the house, and Mrs. Smith was to live there while Jimmy was away. He insisted upon breaking our engagement," said the girl, proudly. "He said he did not know how he would come back—perhaps in his coffin—and he would not consider me tied to one whose health was so uncertain.

"So he put it. Of course, that made no difference to *me,*" she added, flushing as she caught Ben's glance again; "but if it eased his mind at all, I seemed to agree.

"Then he went away," said Miss Perrin, dabbling her eyes again and smothering a sob. "He was away three years. And although his health is much improved he made no money at all in South America.

"Broadname kept him there as long as possible by sending him little driblets of money and seeming to be displeased with his reports. Meantime—all unknown to Jimmy, or to me—Broadname was sending an agent to Mrs. Smith, trying to get her to sell her house; or to give him an option on it.

"It is suspected now that some city buildings are to be constructed in that neighborhood, and Mrs. Smith's property is the key of the whole situation—in the very center of the improvement. Broadname must have known about it as long ago as the time he sent Jimmy away. It is said that he and his accomplices in that company of his have obtained options on every parcel of real estate for several blocks around."

Ben nodded with pursed lips as though he understood about the deal; but to tell the truth Brooks was a little bored.

"Broadname finally obtained Mrs. Smith's signature," Caro Perrin continued, "and by the most despicable trickery. The poor woman was almost penniless. An agent of Broadname posed as a friend of Jimmy. He told Mrs. Smith that Jimmy had got into trouble in South America, that Broadname had spent a lot of money to get him free of the authorities there, and that he was very angry with Jimmy.

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"Instead of Jimmy having an assured position with the construction company when he returned, he was more likely to be sued in the civil courts for the money spent in his behalf, unless Broadname was placated.

"Broadname himself finally came to see her, and to pacify him she agreed—foolish woman that she was—to let him have an option on her place, and at a price ridiculously low considering the boom that will strike that locality; it will scarcely cover the mortgage and accrued interest. That option Broadname holds—or held until his death, and his company of course holds it now.

"Jimmy came home penniless — he worked his way back before the mast on a trading ship. Think of it! He found his mother without means and likely to lose the very roof that sheltered her.

"Oh, Mr. Littell!" she cried, appealing to Ben again, "you cannot imagine the state of mind into which his mother's misery, and his own helplessness, has thrown Jimmy.

"I believe he would have killed John Broadname had he been able to get to him. He is desperate!" She wrung her plump hands as she said it. "I—I could almost kill the wretch myself! Oh, what am I saying? He is already beyond our reach. He will answer for his misdeeds before the infinite tribunal.

"But Jimmy and his mother have been cheated — robbed! And I don't care if John Broadname *is* dead; he has gone before his Maker with a crime upon his conscience—a crime so mean and despicable that I cannot speak of it with calmness.

"Think of it. This helpless couple are ruined by that option. If they could sell the property directly to the city they would get enough to pay the mortgage, place Mrs. Smith in some ease, and give poor Jimmy a fresh start. But as it is—"

She broke down again and wept until her brown eyes were wet with tears as she gazed up at the two friends. Ben looked very fierce, his big hand gripping the chair-arm as it might be the throat of the scoundrelly financier who had caused the Smiths' trouble and this pretty girl's heartache. Brooks fancied it a wise moment to put in a word.

"And what can we do to help you—and your friends—Miss Perrin?" he asked.

"Oh, Mr. Brooks! It does not need so wise a person as yourself to see that not only have my friends been tricked, but there is dastard trickery in this whole game of Broadname and his associates," she declared.

"They should not be allowed to take up these options; it is a crime they propose to perpetrate against the public purse as well as against such unfortunate property holders as the Smiths.

"I know that women are considered the lesser honorable of the two sexes, Mr. Brooks," she added, looking imploringly at him, "despite the poetasters and the novelists. Find some way of getting back this option for Jimmy and his mother. There must be a rat in the meal-bin. Can't you threaten to lay bare the crookedness of the whole scheme and force the company to give up the option?"

"Whew!" muttered Ben, staring at her with wide-open eyes; but Brooks was more philosophical—or he understood the lady better.

It was at this point that the maid came to tell Brooks he was wanted on the wire again. The person at the other end was Mr. Theophilus Cramm.

"*Do* come over here, Mr. Brooks," begged the assistant treasurer of the Broadname Construction Company. "I am at my wits' end. I have no faith in this fellow who is fooling with the lock. And to blow open the door would half wreck the buildings, I verily believe!"

"But I am not a safe expert," Brooks told him.

"Nevertheless, I have a belief that you can help us," urged Cramm.

"I will at least come and look at the lock," the watchmaker said, slowly, and leaving a line for Ben's eye, he found his hat and stick and left the little East Side shop, bending his steps for the offices of the Broadname Construction Company.

But it was actually his interest in that pretty girl, Caro Perrin, that beckoned the watchmaker into this matter — this very

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commonplace matter which, before it was concluded, proved to be as puzzling a mystery as had ever come the way of Mr. Perriton Brooks.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMBINATION.

THE offices of the Broadname Construction Company wore a subdued air, as did the few employees visible about the place. The working force had, for the most part, been given their time until after the funeral of the man who had paid their salaries.

There would, later, be a big funeral and the heads of departments, each in a suit of black, would lead his band of underlings, crape on each man's sleeve. Meantime the bereaved employees went fishing, or down to Coney, or took their several wives and children to the theater, or on other outings. A holiday is a holiday!

When Mr. Perriton Brooks announced to the runner that he wished to see Mr. Cramm, his name was taken into the directors' room and word came out immediately for him to enter.

The directors were not alone.

The furniture had been cleared away from before the vault door, and there were littered on an oilcloth in front of it a mess of tools that would have furnished out several burglar kits. A man in greasy jumper and overalls was wiping his hands on a bit of waste, and literally "washing them of the job," as Brooks entered.

"No, gents all, I can't make nothin' out o' that ere," he was saying. "Mebbe, with an electric drill and a good charge of soup, ye might git inter the vitals of that darned old box before to-morrow noon; but I doubts it."

Stiebold, the vice president, was marching up and down, fretting and fuming.

"All right, all right. We didn't expect you could do anything. You're the third man that's claimed to be an expert, and who has given it up since midnight. I don't know what you are all expert in—not in the mechanism of safe locks, that's sure," he grumbled.

Meanwhile Mr. Theophilus Cramm came forward to greet the watchmaker. "I'm glad you've come, Mr. Brooks," he whispered. "I haven't had any confidence in these fellows myself. But *you* may do something for us."

"I am no cracksman," Perriton Brooks said, grimly; glancing at the man who was just getting through.

Cramm flushed to the roots of his sandy hair. The type of the fellow was unmistakable and he scowled at the one who had failed.

"It was not by *my* advice that Stiebold engaged a man with a police record—a regular yegg—to try to open the safe," he said, excusingly. "And you can at least try, Mr. Brooks, where a burglar has failed—can't you?"

Perriton Brooks wagged his head thoughtfully, as he observed:

"The man who says he'll *try* literally courts failure. I know the make of that lock. It is a modern invention in every particular. No burglar has yet succeeded in forcing the mechanism, and the tumblers of the lock are well-nigh noiseless. If the lock has been kept well oiled I doubt if it makes the slightest sound upon being thrown."

"But Mr. Brooks!" murmured Cramm. "I have heard that your ear is so acute that you could listen while turning the knob of a lock like this, and so work out the combination."

"H-m! That is the point I make. Such a thing has been done—but not with *this* make of lock. Some of the old-fashioned locks have tumblers so noisy that they sound like a load of tinware falling down an areaway when they drop into the cog of the knob-shank. But this lock is an entirely different matter.

"Given sufficient time," added Perriton Brooks, "one might figure out the combination of any lock yet made. But it seems you haven't much time at your disposal?"

"Great Heavens, man!" cried Cramm under his breath. "If that door isn't opened soon we stand to lose a large sum of money. Why, our plans and work for months have culminated in a day's result. It will be too late after the clock strikes

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for noon to-morrow. We have been up all night—some of us. I haven't been home at all since Broadname was stricken. And since last evening we have been combing this city for somebody able to open the safe."

"Mr. Broadname died without regaining consciousness? Without speaking?" Perriton Brooks asked, thoughtfully.

"We thought so," said Cramm.

Later, when Brooks learned the particulars of that awful scene in the death chamber, he knew *why*.

"But Dr. Prentice says that, after we supposed John dead, he *did* speak. Old Timms, Mr. Broadname's valet, told me the nurse was in the room at the time and heard him. But it seems he said nothing of importance."

Brooks was, however, immediately interested. "What did he say?" he asked.

"Why—some jumble of numbers, I believe. I did not pay much attention to old Timms's chattering. However, if the numbers were a part of the lock's combination, of what use to know only part of it?" added the assistant treasurer, pessimistically. "There are six numbers in it; John told me so himself. And we'd have to have them all."

"Quite so. But don't you see the importance of a knowledge of merely the *first figures?*" Brooks demanded sharply. The thing had got hold of his mind now. There was a pretty problem suggested. "If Mr. Broadname spoke, and his audible sounds were actually numbers, it is likely they were the first numbers of the combination. Give me those and I might be able to do something with the lock. Where is this serving-man you speak of?"

"Lundy Timms?"

"Have him called in."

Cramm, looking around nervously at his confrères, said: "Suppose we go up-stairs to Mr. Broadname's apartments? Lundy is right there. This way, if you will, Mr. Brooks," and he led the watchmaker up the stair-flight beside the door of the safe.

At the top the gate of steel bars was locked and Cramm touched the annunciator. In response to the muffled buzz of the bell a man appeared whom Brooks recognized as the type of old-family servant one reads about—not at all the sort of a serving-man one would expect to meet in the house of a get-rich-quick millionaire of John Broadname's class.

Lundy Timms was smoothly shaven, a little gray, dressed in sober black, immaculate. He had served John Broadname ever since the then new-fledged millionaire discovered that he could conserve much time by owning a valet.

When Broadname bought anything he bought the best, which does not always mean the highest priced—at least, not in servants. A business acquaintance who knew Broadname's need imported Lundy from England and the valet was passed on to the then budding millionaire-promoter as a "bonus" in the settlement of an important deal the two financiers had on.

"Mr. Cramm!" the valet said in a singularly toneless voice, turning the key in the gate at once. "Come in. And this gentleman?"

"Mr. Brooks," explained the assistant-treasurer of the Construction Company, who really was ill at ease under the serving-man's eye.

"He has come to see *him?*" The voice of the old man shook, but he was unashamed of his emotion. "There have not been many called as yet."

The watchmaker relieved Cramm's embarrassment by saying:

"I did not know Mr. Broadname. I have asked Mr. Cramm to introduce me because I wish to learn just what took place when your late employer passed away. Mr. Cramm will tell you that my curiosity is pardonable."

"Yes, sir?" queried Timms, looking at the director for assurance. "Very well, sir. I will tell you. The gentlemen had just gone down and I thought, and *they* thought, that poor Mr. Broadname was already dead. But Dr. Prentice says to me, sir, says he: 'Don't cry, Timms—he isn't dead,' or words like that.

"I don't think the doctor means to be harsh; only he's sharp-spoken. And he said I was an old fool. He doesn't know what it means to serve a man so many years as I served Mr. Broadname, sir."

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"I understand," said Brooks, while Cramm tried to look sympathetic.

"So I moved back from the bed, sir. And I was not able to control myself altogether. Very unmanly I fancy, sir. So I went into the window at the far end of the room and drew the curtain about me.

"After a little I saw the doctor go into the hall, and then Miss Ames came in."

"Miss Ames?" questioned Brooks, quickly.

"The nurse, sir. A very lovely girl. A woman with a 'eart, indeed, gentlemen. She went to the bedside to look at my poor master and stood there for a minute, maybe. Then I saw her turn quickly to the window beside the bed and raise the shade. There was no light in the room, but it was not yet dark outside.

"Miss Ames seemed a bit troubled like and I started to go out to her. Then, of a sudden, gentlemen, I knew what was happening. Mr. Broadname was really dying at last. I—I could see his last struggles, sir. I watched my own mother die years ago—back in the old country. I dream of it now, sometimes. And while I halted, sir, hesitating there in the window, I heard somebody speak. Oh! it was a shocking voice! It wasn't like Mr. Broadname's at all. No, indeed. It was just as though somebody else spoke through his lips."

"But it was he?" Brooks asked quietly, while Cramm shuddered and turned his face away. "You are sure of that, Timms?"

"Yes, sir. The voice surely came from the bed. I suppose that he was so—so near gone that his voice was changed."

"And what did he say?"

"Nothing of any consequence, sir," replied Lundy Timms, evidently amazed by the watchmaker's curiosity. "He was counting, sir—he was always figuring, you know—and I suppose this was involuntary like."

He said it simply, and as though he believed what he said.

"Do you remember the numbers he repeated?" asked Brooks.

"Why—I mentioned them to the cook, sir. Now—let—me—see. Six? No! that wasn't it. It was—yes! *sixteen* he said; and *two*."

"Said it just like *that*, did he?"

"Eh? Why — no, sir! Not just like that. He only spoke the two numbers—like this: 'Sixteen, two.' He spoke them slow, and just as though he was reciting some sum to be set down. Only, those two numbers were all he remembered, or could speak."

"And that was the end, Timms?"

"It was, sir."

"Thank you, Timms," Perriton Brooks said, shaking the old man's hand. "You may have helped me in a very delicate inquiry," and he followed Cramm toward the grille-work gate.

"I declare, Timms," ejaculated the director, "you've locked us in."

"Beg pardon, sir," said the valet, hurrying forward. "Force of habit, sir. Mr. Broadname's orders."

"You never forget to lock this gate, I suppose?" said Cramm sourly. "I know that John was mighty particular about it."

Lundy Timms drew the flat key out of his pocket again. "I never forgot to lock it while he was alive, sir," he replied, with what might have been asperity in another man, and the two visitors passed through the gateway and descended the stairs.

"What do you think?" demanded Cramm of the watchmaker and eying him covertly. "Did those numbers mean anything?"

"It is a reasonable supposition that Mr. Broadname was endeavoring to communicate some form of numbers to those about him. Did you gentlemen try to rouse him to consciousness?" asked Brooks shrewdly. "Did you try to get him to communicate to you the combination of the safe lock?"

Cramm, flushing darkly at the remembrance of the scene, nodded.

"Then I believe he spoke the first two numbers of it—'sixteen, two.' I am willing to do what I can," the watchmaker said, but without enthusiasm.

Mr. Cramm plucked up heart and hurried to Harlan Stiebold. "Let Mr. Brooks try it," he urged. "He's got an idea—"

"They've all got ideas—these experts!" snarled the vice-president.

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"But Mr. Brooks doesn't claim to be a safe expert," rejoined Cramm. "I've heard of some things he has done that were really—"

He whispered for a moment or two into his fellow director's ear. Stiebold came over to the watchmaker finally, but with no dawning hope in his countenance.

"What do you think, Mr. Brooks?" he asked, ungraciously enough, when the watchmaker had been introduced. "Can you open it? Or have we got to blow the building to smithereens to get at the contents of the condemned box?"

"Has any tool been used on the lock?" Brooks asked.

"No, sir. We got the tools here, but none of those fellows dared use them."

"And the door must be opened within a few hours?"

"Man alive!" shouted Harlan Stiebold, with sudden exasperation. "If we don't get at that money and those papers in short order, we're lost!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Twelve-Fifteen

by A. M.

Victor Lauriston

I.

ATTORNEY BOB CRAIG'S old shoes were smoldering in the fireplace the night the gray-eyed woman came to see him.

The late September evening was a bit chill. Vida Craig had been housecleaning. Hence the phenomenal upheaval of all things terrestrial, and the smoldering shoes.

Craig, with his evening newspaper, hunched close to the grate, an oasis of comfort in a desert of desolation. The fireplace had not budged, he assumed, because it was built into the solid wall. Otherwise, Vida would have taken it out and dusted it. Strange, how even the nicest girls couldn't resist the temptation to houseclean.

When the maid brought in Miss Flora Sutherland's card, Craig hastily dumped a scuttle of cannel coal over the smoldering relics.

He studied the card. The name was unfamiliar.

"Well, I'll take a look at her, anyway," he told the maid; and rose, smiling, to greet his visitor.

The smile froze when he met the look in her gray eyes.

It was a look that awed Bob Craig, who wasn't used to being awed by anything—the look of a steady seer into distances.

"Miss Sutherland?"

She nodded, and sat down. The lawyer settled again into a chair. He regretted the interruption. His fingers itched for the evening paper.

And then the gray-eyed woman spoke:

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"I want you to defend Allan Fane."

Craig made no effort to hide his surprise.

Ferris, the Wallacetown lawyer, was defending Fane, so far as it was possible to defend Fane; and Ferris, in Craig's estimation, was making the best of an exceedingly poor case. Of course Fane would be hanged; the case was hopeless, anyway.

"Pardon me," he interposed, "but—"

"I was in Wallacetown all day. I heard what people were saying. I read the Carisford papers. Everybody is talking about the case. I want you to take it."

Craig's uplifted hand halted her.

"It seems to me, Miss Sutherland," he said, "that professional etiquette demands that the invitation should come from Mr. Ferris—"

"Mr. Ferris won't object."

"No?"

"Not at all. He is—he is ill, I understand—not able to appear in court—"

How big those gray eyes were, thought Craig—and how they kept on looking through him into distance. He had seen returned soldiers, limping along the streets of Carisford, with just such a deep gaze—the gaze of men who have looked on death, and on horrors worse than death.

Did those eyes mirror this young woman's horror of Allan Fane's crime—the murder of his best friend?

She spoke again.

"Won't you, Mr. Craig?" Her tone was all winning eagerness.

"First," he said, "I want to get my facts straight." He fingered the card; then turned on her with a swift question.

"Where did you meet Fane?"

Her gaze did not flinch.

"In the hospital at Château Royaumont, near Paris—the Scottish Women's Suffrage League hospital—"

"And you just arrived in this country?"

"I applied for leave as soon as I heard. I could not get away earlier."

"Have you seen Fane?"

"No. He is in jail here. I was advised first to see his lawyer at Wallacetown. I did. From what I heard, I did not like the way the lawyer was handling the case. Every one told me you were the best lawyer in Carisford—"

"Every one lied."

"So I came straight to you. Whatever is to be done, must be done quickly."

That, mused Craig, was true enough. Fane's trial at the fall term would open a week hence. Well, Ferris would simply have to muddle through the best way he could.

This woman was an old-country girl. She had been a nurse, of course. That was how she came to meet Fane. The charming scamp had deluded her into believing him better than he was. Well, the only honest thing was to disillusionize her at once, if he had to be brutal.

"I'm afraid," he began bruskly, "you don't understand this case. You don't know this fellow, Fane, as I know him. He left his country for his country's good—because a muddle-headed magistrate at Wallacetown thought a bad criminal ought to make a good soldier. It was the Canadian Expeditionary Forces or the penitentiary; so Fane chose the C. E. F. The first week he was in khaki he got C. B., and he got it plenty after that—for repeated insubordination. He had no use for authority of any kind. And—"

The gray eyes flashed.

"Allan Fane never had a chance."

"Oh, didn't he?" Craig used the whip of brutality unsparingly. "Andrew Fletcher picked him off the streets because he had a nice face, took him into the best home in Wallacetown, used him like his own son—and he went wrong, just the same. Andrew Fletcher made him his heir—and still he went wrong. I saw the boy in police court that day he enlisted. He was stiff, unrepentant, not a bit sorry that he had broken the old man's heart."

"But—Mr. Craig—"

"Listen to me," insisted Craig, almost savagely. "I know the whole story, and you don't. Fane went overseas, and disgraced the uniform he wore. Then he came home, and killed his benefactor in selfish fear that he might be disinherited—"

"Mr. Craig!" The gray-eyed young woman was on her feet, leaning over him. "Mr. Craig—that's wrong. The Allan Fane I knew at Royaumont could not have done that, because—because he promised

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me to keep straight, and—I know he kept his word."

"Have you seen him since?" asked the lawyer dryly.

"N-no."

"Sit down," urged Craig. Yes, she was a very self-deluded young woman. "Did you see Mr. Ferris?"

"Mr. Ferris is wrong. He has been trying to show that it was aberration—temporary insanity—the result of shell-shock. Why, what good will it do to give Allan Fane his freedom if he comes out of court with the shadow of a crime still hanging over him?"

Craig's look grew grave. This young woman's earnestness was amazing. Yes, it was implacable. There was not the slightest hint of concession in her tone or manner.

Fane was innocent. Fane could not have done this thing. Why? Simply because Fane had promised her he would live straight — and Fane could not break his word.

"Will you let me go over the evidence?" he urged more kindly.

He was sorry for this self-deluded young lady, but he had to put her right.

She listened patiently enough. Fane, coming home from overseas after his discharge, went straight to Wallacetown, to his foster-father, old Andrew Fletcher. He reached there in the afternoon. He was there when Basil Dorgan, Fletcher's nephew, called that evening; and he was still there when Dorgan left at a late hour.

Dorgan had found the two men quarreling, but managed to smooth over the difference. After Dorgan left, the dispute was renewed—the servants up-stairs were awakened by the sound of loud voices. They saw the soldier running from the house; in his study down-stairs they found old man Fletcher dead—choked to death.

Next morning Fane was found marching along the country road, singing "Tipperary." He couldn't give the slightest account of what had happened after the first quarrel—at least, so he claimed.

"He is left alone with Fletcher." Craig impressively lowered his voice. "There is a dispute. Fletcher is killed. Fane is seen running out of the house. When found, he refuses to give any account of himself." He paused, as though to ask: "Where is the weak link in the chain?"

"I have heard all that," returned Flora Sutherland quietly.

"On the strength of that evidence," pursued Craig, "Ferris bases his defense—aberration resulting from shell-shock, and precipitated by the violent quarrel. It's sheer camouflage, of course. But it's the one possible defense."

"No."

"What would you have?"

"A straight plea of not guilty. That is the only way to save Allan Fane."

"From the gallows?" Craig's tone was skeptical.

"No. From himself."

II.

It was Craig who relieved the silence.

"Pardon me," he said; and, reaching for the telephone, put in a long-distance call for Ferris at Wallacetown.

Ferris, ultimately routed out of bed, listened with grumbling impatience to the Carisford lawyer's explanations.

"So far as I'm concerned," he snapped, "you're welcome to the brief, Craig. I can't handle the case. I—I'm not feeling quite myself."

"You mean," Craig shot over the wire, "that you're sick of a hopeless case? That you want to throw up the sponge?"

"Now, see here, Craig—"

"That's just what you mean, Ferris?"

"Y-yes, I do mean it." The country lawyer's tone grew firmer. "Between you and me, Craig, that fellow Fane is guilty as hell. He killed old Andrew Fletcher deliberately to prevent his changing that will. And he'll hang for it as sure as the sun rises to-morrow morning. Nothing you or I can do can save the fellow. Any one who wants to defend him is welcome to the chance."

Craig hung up the receiver presently.

"It's just as I thought," he said gently. "Ferris realizes the case is hopeless, and doesn't want to carry it on. Well, I don't want the case, either. To be perfectly plain, I won't take it. Miss Sutherland," he added more kindly, as he saw her white disappointment, "I'm sorry to say no to

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you, but so far as Fane is concerned, I have no regrets. It's too late in this last week to do anything for him, and I could do nothing if I had a year. If Ferris will not continue, you might try Hawke. He's pretty shrewd—the most experienced lawyer in Carisford—I'll give you a note to him—"

He whipped out his fountain-pen.

"I don't want a note to Mr. Hawke," interposed the pertinacious Miss Sutherland. "I want you to take the case."

Craig was nonplused.

"I've heard all these things you've told me. I've heard them so often in these twenty-four hours that they have ceased to hurt. They don't signify. The people who say them don't know. They've never seen the things that Allan Fane and I have seen; they haven't gone through that—that hell."

Craig was about to speak, but something in the woman's gaze commanded silence—and silent he kept himself.

"You think the thing that counts is to get an acquittal, on any sort of plea—to save his life. What is life, anyway, Mr. Craig? It doesn't count. I know. I had four brothers—they're dead, all of them, now, but they died in this war—for their country. For what was right. It's better to live a few weeks and hold your self-respect, and be right in your own eyes, than to slink through life with a stain on you. Don't you see, Mr. Craig?"

He said nothing.

"That was what he would prefer—the Allan Fane I knew at Royaumont. Why—"

Craig listened. Her eyes held him, her earnestness gripped him. She was telling the story of it all. His fingers clenched. He could see Fane go over the top; he could see her beside the wounded soldier's cot; he felt the realization that there were things in life beside which life itself was cheap.

Yes, and he felt the thrill Fane himself must have felt at the nearness of this woman with the tense faith.

That was it—faith. Those gray eyes had discerned, through shallow pretense, that other Allan Fane that Wallacetown had not seen. They had unlocked the hidden chambers of a scapegrace soul.

Craig came down to earth with practical suddenness.

"I'll defend Allan Fane," he said.

Yet he stayed practical.

"Remember," he urged once more, "I might be almost sure of acquittal on the other plea—aberration—"

"I know Allan Fane," she insisted. "He must have a clear-cut verdict."

"I'm afraid he will," thought Craig.

III.

CRAIG next morning found himself wondering why he had taken so hopeless a case. Yes, he remembered now, there was something Flora Sutherland had said—but what had she said? He could not remember, try as he would, what argument had swung him.

He wondered, and appraised himself a fool to have let this girl's big, gray eyes and deadly earnestness get the better of his sober judgment.

He felt the more disgusted with himself after interviewing Allan Fane at the county jail.

Fane, he reluctantly admitted, had changed a trifle for the better. In the old days he had been good-looking in a youthful, effeminate way; but three years of soldiering had filled out his slim figure and strengthened his attractive face.

"You've got to go into the witness-box and deny you killed Fletcher," said Craig peremptorily. He had no time to argue.

Fane gazed at the lawyer with troubled yet steady eyes.

"I can't do that."

"If you don't, they'll hang you."

Fane whitened. "I can't, just the same."

"But why can't you?"

"Simply because I don't know whether I killed dad—I mean, Mr. Fletcher." Fane shuddered. "I can't see how I could ever do such a thing—I don't know how it happened. Was I there, anyway?" He passed his hand over his forehead. "Yes, there was a racket of some kind, and—and then my head began to buzz—and next thing I knew it was morning, and I was on patrol and wondering why the devil Fritz hadn't started strafing yet."

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If this were not real, it was superb acting. Craig pondered.

"You believe you didn't do it?"

"How could I have ever done it?" Now fear was in the young man's eyes.

"Then surely you can swear you didn't—and stick to it—"

Fane looked straight at him.

"No. You see, I might have done it."

Craig's nails bit into his palms. Such meticulous nicety—such rare punctilio—did not jibe with the daredevil Allan Fane he had known.

"You see," added the soldier, "I promised some one—well, never mind about that; but I'll tell you just this, Mr. Craig: I can't take chances with the truth. I could only tell them that I thought I didn't do it—that I hadn't the slightest reason to do it. You see," he apologized, "I was shell-shocked in the Somme fight. That's why they had to let me out. A bit of extra excitement throws me off my trolley and my mind starts to buzz—"

"It didn't when you were arrested?"

"No. Maybe the shock of that brought me back for good. I hope so."

"Then," said Craig grimly, "I wish they'd arrested you three days sooner."

All the while the lawyer had watched Fane closely. He wanted to know if his client told the truth.

Craig inclined to think the aberration genuine, not mere pretense, as he had first surmised. Fane's story might actually be true. If so—if alienists confirmed him—what a defense he might have had!

He might use it yet, if he had to. His first duty was to his client, not to Flora Sutherland.

Said Fane just then:

"I don't want any insanity plea, Mr. Craig."

That afternoon Craig sat in his office long after the staff had gone. He wanted opportunity, quite alone, dispassionately to review the evidence.

He could not feel sure what line Prosecutor McAllum would take; but he did know Prosecutor McAllum's past vindictiveness.

With all his pose of an impartial seeker after justice, McAllum was out to hang Fane. His attitude at the inquest and the preliminary hearing had left no doubt of that.

Before Craig's fancy, as his mind reviewed the case, rose the vindictive figure of McAllum, driving each vital point of evidence relentlessly home—

McAllum at rest, nervously twitching his slight mustache, smiling satirically out of his pale-blue eyes—

McAllum, raking up all that dismal, grim past that the young man had fairly atoned for when he put on khaki and went to do his bit—

McAllum, out to "get Fane" by hook or by crook.

"Damnable odds!" exclaimed Craig savagely.

There was a tap on the door.

"Come in," said the lawyer, glowering across the red rug at the cannel coal crackling in the grate.

Flora Sutherland came quietly in.

"You have seen him?"

Craig nodded.

"It's no use," he said desperately.

"But can't I help?"

"How?"

"I'll go into the box myself and tell them everything. How he told me in the hospital, 'I'll square away and make a man of myself'—and I know he did."

Craig smiled tragically. When were a woman's intuitions allowed as evidence?

Yet for a deliberative moment he weighed the pros and cons. The pretty girl who had swayed him so stupendously against his better judgment would surely be an asset with a jury. Flora Sutherland might have the same amazing effect on the twelve good men and true that she had had on him.

Then he shook his head.

"I dare not put you in the box."

He could picture McAllum in cross-examination wresting from Flora Sutherland's unwilling lips the story of what Fane had been before he made that promise.

"I could tell them," she interposed hopefully, "that over there he did his bit—and more."

Craig, staring at her, heard McAllum's resonant voice addressing the jury. "His majesty's uniform is not a license to com-

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mit murder. That the man accused has worn it, and lived, should not blind us to the fact that thousands of our boys have worn it, and died that we might be shielded from such crimes as this—"

Craig shook his head again.

"But I came thousands of miles to help Allan Fane—"

"Miss Sutherland," he returned, "I dare not take the risk."

Then he sat up briskly, glimpsing sudden hope.

"I need more time. I'll get it. The jurors are all farmers, and every farmer is needed right now on the soil. McAllum might agree to release the jury and let the case stand over till next spring—"

Flora Sutherland brightened.

"But"—her eyes fell—"he must stay in jail so long."

Craig realized next morning that this straw of hope was a slight one. After all, a murder trial was too serious a thing to be thus shuttled back and forth.

Yet he made his proposition to the prosecutor.

"Nothing doing, Friend Craig." And McAllum twirled his mustache.

"Your client," added the prosecutor, "might as well plead guilty and throw himself on the mercy of the court."

"Damn!" snarled Craig, and stalked out. The prosecutor's thin, contemptuous laugh floated after him.

IV.

CANADIAN courts pride themselves on their swift execution of justice. Craig himself had boasted once that a criminal court in the old, gray court-house at Carisford could try, convict, and hang a murderer in half the time that it took to empanel the Thaw jury.

Now, that youthful bit of bluster came back to hit him hard. He felt himself desperately crowded. He had no time left to search far and wide for testimony out of which to build a case.

He had to improvise his case as General Sandeman Carey improvised an army when Gough's fifth army broke—out of what odds and ends of material came handy. He hoped a little from the natural carelessness of the police in dealing with a perfectly obvious case. He hoped, too, for a cue from the confident prosecutor.

Meanwhile, talking with Flora Sutherland, he laid his cards on the table.

"I'll play up that Fane was a soldier. Sentiment — that's our only hope. Sidestep his record here, of course. And drive hard wherever their case shows a hint of weakness."

Long before the first afternoon's evidence closed Craig realized that he was up against a stone wall.

The servants gave testimony, circumstantial but damning; they had heard the quarrel, had heard Dorgan leave, had heard the dispute renewed after Dorgan left. They had heard Fane run out, slamming the door; from the upper windows had seen him, in his soldier's cap and greatcoat, hurrying across the street. Then the housekeeper had ventured down and found Mr. Fletcher dead.

Craig pounded them all with relentless cross-examination, and most of all the housekeeper. He fairly harrowed the testimony of neighbors who, wakened by the noise, saw the soldier leave the house.

Once only he glanced at his client. Fane was very white, but his eyes stayed steady.

Craig saw that Flora Sutherland, seated beside him, trembled.

He drew his lips tight. He could understand what suffering this realization brought her—realization that Fane was guilty, and that theirs was a lost cause.

McAllum, from each witness, contrived to bring out some fragment of Fane's old record.

"It's damnable," whispered Craig to the girl beside him. "Couldn't the fellow leave the past alone?"

But McAllum's tactics were shrewd—devilishly so. Every forgotten escapade thus recalled deepened the prejudice against the man accused. Craig could feel that prejudice in the chill attitude of the crowded court-room each time he rose for his cross-questioning.

Yet desperately he hammered on, and between times watched hopelessly while McAllum, with a cloud of witnesses, riveted the crime upon Fane.

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The second day of the trial McAllum put in medical testimony.

"Might not apoplexy have caused death?" questioned Craig.

"Apoplexy could not have caused the finger-marks on Fletcher's throat," was the crushing reply.

Yet Craig pressed the question. It might be possible to sift into the testimony of the prosecution some hint of doubt. That, and the fact that he had worn khaki, might yet save Fane—though the grim faces of the watchful jurors betokened otherwise.

In his desperation Craig ventured a hypothetical question. He was surprised that McAllum did not object, that the court let it by.

"Do you know anything about shell-shock?"

"A little," testified the physician on the stand modestly. "I spent a year with the A. M. C."

"A man who has suffered shell-shock might after recovery be subject to mental lapses brought on by excitement, when he would be irresponsible?"

Craig looked away from Flora Sutherland as he put the question.

"He might."

Craig felt he had gained a point.

McAllum, in rebuttal, asked one question:

"The shock of finding that he had committed a serious crime might result in lapse of memory?"

"Very likely."

There dangled the insinuation that the aberration, if it really existed, might be due, not to the dispute between Fane and Fletcher, but to Fane's remorse for a crime committed while in full possession of his senses. Craig felt he was countered.

In the lawyer's lounging-room, after the court had adjourned for lunch, Craig encountered a big man in shabby clothes. The big man was putting on a battered, green fedora that had once been black. He was Adam Hawke, the leader of the Carisford bar, attired to meet his farmer clients.

"Bob, my boy," said Hawke kindly, "you're tuckered out."

"It's a strain," confessed Craig bitterly. Reaction hit him hard; he was not himself. "It wouldn't be so bad if I had a fighting chance, but—"

"That was a good cross-examination," Hawke encouraged him. "If those witnesses had been lying, you would have broken them." He drew Craig into a quiet corner. "I've been through the mill, boy." Craig thrilled in response to his deep-toned sympathy. "I've felt that very strain. I've seen witnesses reel under it. It's wonderful how rarely a man caves, though. There's something in most men to carry them over the hard road. I've seen men stagger out of the witness-box, white, sick, broken. Yet they manage to hold up till I say, 'You may go.'"

He paused.

"I've often thought," he added, "that if, ten minutes after I finished cross-questioning, I could fling a single question at a witness, I could break him, every time."

"Why?"

"Did you ever play football, Craig—with an ankle twisted, or a wrist sprained, or a couple of ribs caved in? You hold right up through the scrimmage, but afterward—"

He paused.

"If you'd have to play ten minutes after you scored the winning goal, it would kill you. It's just that way with the witness—or with the lawyer. A man is weakest when the strain is lifted. The reaction is sickening."

Craig shrugged his shoulders.

"What do you think of my case?"

The older lawyer smiled, compassionately, Craig thought.

"Boy, I know you'll do your darndest."

Craig knew what that meant; yet he stuck out his jaw, just the same. Hawke had followed the evidence, and Hawke realized there was no hope. And Hawke was right about that strain and that reaction. He would struggle through—somehow—and then—why, then, a child could break him with a feather.

V.

TOWARD the close of the second afternoon McAllum put Basil Dorgan in the box.

That meant the case for the prosecution

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was nearly closed, mused Craig. McAllum's tactics he knew; McAllum was not the man to close a case with trivial evidence. He held his strongest witness to the last.

Dorgan was old Andrew Fletcher's nephew, a middle-aged, hard-faced man with eyes cold as icicles. Craig knew him distantly—eminently respectable and eminently close-fisted. He did not like him. Beneath his mantle of respectability he had done things that Craig's impulsive nature did not like, but that the methodical law did not interfere with.

With an air of reluctance Dorgan told of the last encounter between Fane and Fletcher when the young soldier came home to his foster-father.

He had come to Wallacetown to see Fletcher on business, and found the two in the midst of their dispute. Apparently Fletcher was angry at Fane and had threatened to cut him off.

"His will was made in Fane's favor?" questioned Prosecutor McAllum dryly.

"Yes."

Craig leaned closer. There was something cold-blooded about Dorgan's eyes that he did not like.

"Then," pursued McAllum, "if Fletcher were—er—to die, the estate would go to Fane?"

Craig objected vehemently. McAllum merely smiled. No amount of objection, no ruling of the court, could sponge out the impression that question had made on the minds of the jurors.

Yes, decided Craig, there was something cold-blooded in the very reluctance with which Dorgan incriminated Fane. Yet Dorgan's testimony impressed him. Dorgan was frank to a degree, concise, clear-spoken, and sorry—yes, sorry for Fane. Craig didn't like his testimony. He saw it impressed the jury.

Then he woke, with a start, to a forgotten fact; to the certainty that all these witnesses were telling the simple, hideous truth; that Fane was guilty.

He took up his cross-examination. McAllum had not fully established the hour that Dorgan left. Craig prodded that apparently weak spot.

"I stayed quite late," said Dorgan. "I was trying to smooth over the difference between Fletcher and Fane. Then, my train did not leave till 12.35 A.M., and Fletcher urged me to stay." He hesitated. "He seemed afraid."

"Of what?"

"Of Fane. The young man was—ah—very violent in his threats."

Craig leaned closer.

"Will you swear Fletcher was not afraid of *you?*"

McAllum wriggled in his seat, and glared angrily at Craig.

"You were his only blood relation?" pursued Craig, almost menacingly. "If he were removed by death, and Fane by the law, you would inherit his entire estate?"

McAllum glared again. The purport of all this was plain. Craig was trying to suggest a doubt as between Fane and Dorgan.

Then the prosecutor's sarcastic smile returned, and he twirled his mustache. The jurors, he saw—and Craig saw it, too—were unimpressed.

Dorgan, quite unmoved, answered question after question, covering his movements that night. He had left at twelve o'clock, to walk to the station, and reached the square in front of the town hall at 12.15 A.M.

McAllum smiled.

Craig, cursing the futility of it all, continued his stubborn questioning. Here he had almost deluded himself into belief that Fane might be innocent; but Fane was guilty. He must not forget that. Fane was guilty. He could fight Fane's battle the better if he never lost sight of the truth—that Fane was guilty.

"How do you fix the time you reached the square?" he demanded.

"I asked a man on the corner what time it was. He called my attention to the tower-clock. It marked twelve fifteen."

He paused, outwardly quite calm; yet Craig could sense the sneering triumph in his cold eyes.

It was at twelve fifteen that morning—Sunday, April 14—that the soldier had run wildly from the Fletcher mansion, and the servants had found the old man dead.

Dorgan could not have been in both places at the selfsame moment.

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"We stood there a few minutes talking. The man said he thought it was going to rain again. I mentioned that I had to catch the twelve thirty-five. He said, 'You better be going.' Then we glanced again at the clock. It marked twelve twenty. I hurried to the station, and reached it just in time to catch the train."

Craig harried Dorgan with relentless cross-questioning as to hour and minute. When he had tired himself, the jurors, the prosecutor, everybody but cold-blooded, respectable Dorgan, by his futile questioning, the judge interposed:

"Let us get on with the evidence."

Craig desisted.

McAllum called the station-agent, who remembered Dorgan's arrival. Craig stuck to his cross-questioning, till again the impatient judge intervened. The futility of it all made the bulldog lawyer feel foolish. He realized with a sinking of the heart that his desperate efforts had shaken the prosecution not the least.

"Nicholas Tanzer," called McAllum.

Craig wondered who Nicholas Tanzer was. He was soon enlightened. Nicholas Tanzer was a furtive-eyed, horsey man, who kept a livery-stable at Wallacetown—the man who had met Dorgan on the square at the very moment that Andrew Fletcher was killed.

Tanzer corroborated Dorgan in every detail.

"You met at twelve fifteen?" asked Craig. "How do you fix the hour and moment?"

The judge shuffled in his seat.

"Pardon me, Mr. Craig, but it is late—almost twelve fifteen—"

The legal lights flickered with dutiful laughter at the judicial jest.

"Would not an adjournment be in order?"

Craig went down with colors flying. "I will cross-question in the morning," he announced.

As he rode home in his car, a sudden idea flashed to him. The housekeeper—the first to find Andrew Fletcher, and alone with Fletcher in that room for a bare moment?

He dismissed the idea the instant it occurred. He knew the woman well enough for that.

At home, he collapsed into a chair before the fire. His reaction had come—it had not waited for him to finish muddling through.

VI.

CRAIG realized that there was no loophole. Tanzer's testimony had clinched Dorgan's evidence. His own tense, protracted questioning of Dorgan had merely served to make Dorgan's alibi the more effective.

Of course Fane was guilty. Why had he ever allowed himself to forget that, even for a moment? Was it the girl's influence that had misled his common sense—or was it something in Fane himself, sun-tanned, clear-eyed, to all seeming doubly the man for the three years of furnace-fire he had gone through?

Craig struggled up, gesticulating wildly.

What did it matter, anyway? Before this he had tried, and failed. He was taking this thing too seriously. Surely, it was all in his day's work.

"To my way of thinking, girly," he muttered weakly, as Vida Craig came down-stairs in slippered feet, "a man might as well be hanged as spend all his life behind bars."

"It's late," she told him, practically. "Past midnight, Bob. You need sleep. You'll feel more like yourself after a night's rest."

"Rest!" he exclaimed. "I can't rest. I'd just lie awake and think of this accursed case. I want to play the coward and run away from it all."

"That's a dear."

"You'd better turn in and get your beauty sleep," he added. "I'll be all right."

To which she tossed her head, and settled on a foot-stool with her chin on her hands, looking up at him with an understanding silence that Craig loved.

"Where's the evening paper? Oh, darn it, I left it at court. Is there anything to read?"

"I've just finished housecleaning," said Vida Craig contritely.

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Craig realized that. The fern on the center-table was set neatly on a spotless doily. The bric-à-brac in the china-cabinet fairly shone. Only his wife's understanding silence reconciled him to the ghastly, all-pervading neatness.

Not a newspaper was in sight. Everything fresh, he realized, had been used to line shelves. He glanced at the book-cases, shrank from Carlyle, turned away from Scott—then his eye lit on the ornamental waste-basket in an inconspicuous corner.

He pounced upon it. Vida Craig saw, and smiled, and held her peace. She had swept those old papers from the shelves that morning, and had been too busy to burn them.

Craig sank into his chair, and filled his pipe, and spread out a five-month-old newspaper. Let Fane hang!

He reveled in the April predictions. What fools these prophets were! He read the advertisements of new spring styles, and smoked, and forgot Basil Dorgan and McAllum, and the prisoner at the bar, and even gray-eyed Flora Sutherland. He turned page after page, and let his mind run—run away, away, away from the losing fight.

And then, with an exclamation, he dropped his pipe, covering the freshly manicured rug with ashes, burned a hole in his house-coat, almost upset the fern—and reached for the telephone.

VII.

Craig, coming into court next morning, shook hands with his client, and nodded wearily to McAllum.

"Well, Friend Craig," whispered the prosecutor in an ironic aside, "this is the day the price of hemp goes up?"

Craig looked tired. One could tell he had not slept much. His eyes were heavy.

"Unless you bewilder us with a cloud of witnesses—eh? Every day you spend in testimony is that much respite."

"I'm putting in just one witness."

"Oh?"

McAllum's uplifted brows spelled derision as Craig slumped heavily into his chair.

Tanzer was recalled to the stand.

"You are on your oath," Craig reminded him solemnly.

"Yes, sir."

Craig looked at him hard a moment. The man was nervous. There was nothing in that, though. Most witnesses were nervous.

In slow tones he began a dragging cross-examination—tedious, terribly so, to the entire court. The judge on the dais, the counsel within the bar, the jurors, the crowd in the court-room, began to shift nervously and to cough. Relentlessly Craig probed into the man's relations with Dorgan, and learned nothing. Then, step by step, he sought to trace Tanzer's movements while Dorgan was in Wallacetown—and learned nothing.

"We met just by chance," insisted Tanzer.

"You say that you met Basil Dorgan in front of the town hall at Wallacetown on the night of the murder, at 12.15 A.M.?" Craig asked, not for the first time.

"Yes, sir."

"That was at 12.15 A.M. on the 14th day of April, 1918?"

"Yes, sir."

The judge interposed.

"Mr. Craig, we have been over all this ground—"

Craig smiled deferentially.

"Your lordship, I felt that I must have misunderstood the witness. In so vital a matter I wish to be absolutely certain." He spoke to the judge, but his eyes were on the jurors. "Our entire case hinges on this point. I will ask just one question more." He whirled on Tanzer.

A glint of satisfaction showed in the man's shifty eyes, beneath the strain, at this prospect of release.

"How do you fix the time?"

Tanzer's reply came a bit unsteadily.

"We—Dorgan and I—looked at the town-hall clock. It marked exactly twelve fifteen. We talked for several minutes, and Dorgan mentioned having to catch a train at twelve thirty-five. We looked again. Then it was twelve twenty."

"Exactly?"

"Exactly."

"That will do," said Craig.

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There was a long moment of silence. Then Craig fancied a sigh of disappointment. Were there, after all, a few in the court who saw Allan Fane as Flora Sutherland saw him, as Craig himself was slowly coming to see him—a man who had struggled hard to lift himself from hopeless depths—and who might not be guilty?

McAllum smiled grimly.

"Mr. Craig's cross-questioning has confirmed our case so well," he said, "I feel I need ask no questions. We rest our case here."

Craig sat back a moment. Tanzer, pale and weak from reaction after the long strain, was slowly leaving the box. He trembled, and seemed to stagger. The lawyer rose.

"Call Thomas Jackson," he said in a low, clear voice.

A wizen little man hobbled into the box, and kissed the ancient Bible.

"You are the caretaker of the Wallacetown town hall?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where were you at 12.15 A.M., on April 14, 1918?"

The wizen man scratched his head. Craig had told him to do that. He hesitated. All eyes had centered on him.

All eyes except Craig's. Craig, watching Tanzer like a cat, saw the horsey man grip the back of a chair.

Craig repeated his question.

"Where were you at 12.15 A.M., on April 14, 1918?"

"Mr. Craig"—Thomas Jackson hesitated—"Mr. Craig, there never was any such an hour in Wallacetown. Daylight-saving all through the country went into force at 2 A.M., but at midnight, precise, Mr. Craig, just as the town council told me, I put the hands of the town-clock one full hour ahead."

Craig heard a gasp and a fall. He knew, without turning, that in his weakest moment—the moment of reaction when he thought himself safe—Tanzer was broken.

VIII.

McAllum was angry.

Then he surrendered with the best grace he could.

It was not in the excited court-room, but in a witness-room, in a brief interlude of private cross-questioning by the prosecutor, that Tanzer told all he knew. What he actually did know was little enough. He had been in Dorgan's debt. Dorgan appeared sore that Fane had not been killed overseas, and that Fletcher still insisted on making Fane his heir.

"And what did he do?"

"I don't know—only he told me to be on that corner at twelve fifteen, and he'd let up on me if I'd swear I met him there. And—"

"He did not come?" put in Craig.

Tanzer gazed helplessly at McAllum.

"Spit it out!" commanded the prosecutor.

With all his relentlessness toward a man he had thought guilty, he had no eagerness to hang a man who was innocent.

"He didn't come," said Tanzer. "Not then. But he came running just before train-time and gave me the soldier-coat and hat he was wearing, and told me to burn them—and I did."

McAllum grimaced.

The case was plain enough. Fane had gone out first, driven by his temporary aberration, bareheaded and coatless, just as he was found next morning—and Dorgan had stayed, Dorgan had disputed with old man Fletcher, Dorgan had choked the old man in murderous anger. And Dorgan it was, wearing the soldier's cap and great-coat, that servants and neighbors saw running from the house and mistook for Fane.

After Fane was discharged, he called with Miss Flora Sutherland to thank Robert Craig. But it was the gray-eyed girl who spoke:

"I was right, Mr. Craig. You were our only hope—we'd never have won if you hadn't fought so hard."

"You'd have lost if I had fought harder," retorted Craig enigmatically. "You won just because I quit for fifteen minutes—yes, and timed my quitting just when Vida Craig had finished house-cleaning."

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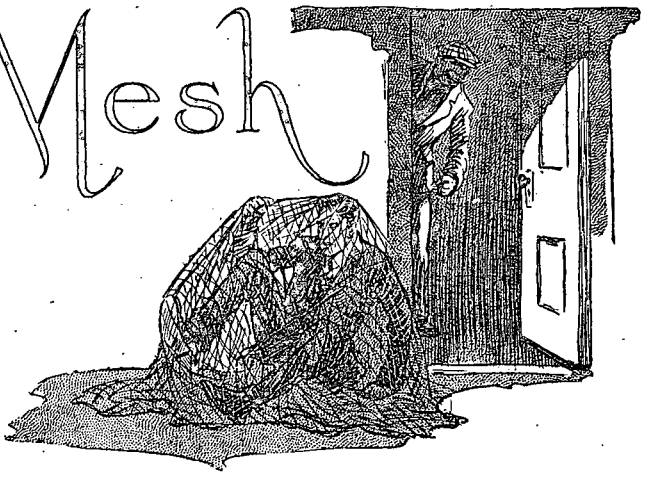
The Mesh



by George C. Jenks

Author of "Thews of Battle," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

SUSPICIONS.

A LIVERIED youth, with a penetrating voice, skimmed over the tessellated lower floor of the Hotel Supremacy, yawping nasally at measured intervals:

"Mr. Oliver, please! Mr. Oliver, please!"

The lobby did not yield Mr. Oliver. So the boy, light-footed and persistent, "paged" him in the luxurious café, which, with its rather overdone decorations, its life-size oil studies in the nude—including a painting of "Aphrodite" was a marvel of voluptuous flesh tints—its freshly barbered, white-clad bartenders, its incessant tinkling of glass, its lazy clouds of blue smoke, and its noisily talking groups of well-dressed men, was redolent of prosperous masculinity.

"Mr. Oliver, please!" sang the page.

"What's that, boy?"

A slim young man in evening clothes, leaning negligently against the end of the mahogany bar, held up a languid finger.

At first glance the young man seemed almost a boy himself. But when he spoke, certain little crooked lines leaped to the corners of his eyes, while others ran from the base of his rather long nose to the drooping ends of his thin lips, and he aged immediately. He was probably about thirty.

"Mr. Oliver?" queried the boy. Then, as there was no immediate reply, he held out a card on a salver. "The gentleman's in the grill."

The lounger seemed barely to glance at the card. But any one familiar with the capacity of such shifty yellow eyes as he possessed would know that he had read the name in that one swift flash.

He waved the salver away.

"I'm not Mr. Oliver. You'll find him in the palm-room."

The slim young man sauntered out of one door as the page slithered through another, bound for the gorgeous *salle à manger* at the other side of the lobby, where several scores of people were dining magnificently under the sheltering palms.

"Mr. Oliver, please!"

A broad-shouldered man, whose good-humored face looked as if it might have been wind-swept and sun-browned for most of his thirty-five years or so, and whose white shirt-front seemed a yard wide, jumped from his chair at a neighboring table and swung the drawling boy around as he might have dealt with a roped steer.

"Hold on, son! What Oliver do you want? What's the gent's first name?"

The boy referred to a scrap of paper and answered: "Mr. Barry Oliver."

"That's me. Who wants—gimme me that card!"

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He read the name, and emitted a whoop that startled people around them, although the steady hum of conversation swallowed it up before it could get far.

"Where is he, boy? Where the blazes is he? Bring him here. Say, Lucy—he turned to the pretty girl at the other side of the table—"it's Bob Tower! The durned old fraud! How did he know we were here? Gee! This is the real stuff." He saw the boy still standing near the table. "Get out, young fellow. Didn't I tell you to bring him here? Never mind! I'll get him myself. Take me to him."

But the pretty girl had something to say about this. She was on her feet, her slim fingers holding Mr. Oliver's wrist with a power that did not astonish him, although a stranger might have wondered.

"You stay right here, Barry Oliver!" she ordered, in low, decisive tones. "You're not in Arizona now, to go loping away whenever the notion strikes you. Have some respect for your sister. Besides, you might not be able to find your way back in this big, rambling hotel."

"Huh! I never lost myself on a back trail yet," was the grumbling rejoinder. "And who says I don't respect you? I'd like to see the cuss who'd dare—" He stopped and roared at the boy: "Bring Mr. Tower here, durn you!"

"Here I am, Barry!" broke in a pleasant voice. "I just heard you were in this room."

A stalwart young fellow, in the uniform of a captain of artillery, seized his hand in a grip as wiry as his own, and the two shook with the ardor of men who really like each other.

"Why, you durned old long-legged maverick!" bellowed Barry, bringing a hamlike hand down on Bob Tower's shoulder with a slam that jarred him. "I ain't set eyes on you since you pulled your freight out of Tucson, six years ago. Gee! I'm glad to see—" He caught sight of the boy, who was absently fanning himself with his salver as he stared at the tempestuous meeting. "Get out of this, you wall-eyed coyote! What are you blinking at? Here!"

He dragged out a thick roll of bills, peeled one off, and thrust it at the page, who saw a "V" on it, and mumbling an incoherent "Thank you, sir!" hurried away in a panic of bewildered delight.

"Oh, by the way, Bob!" went on Barry, in a more moderate tone. "I beg your pardon! You used to know Lucy, my sister. That is, you've seen her, I think. Wasn't she home from school when you were on the ranch? Lucy, you don't remember Mr. Tower?"

"I shouldn't have known him, but I believe I remember his being with you for a while," she said, as she gave Bob Tower her firm little hand.

"Nigh five weeks it was," put in Barry.

Lucy laughed, and oh, what a sweet, rippling laugh it was!

"Yes. But I was only thirteen then, and Mrs. Rowton never would let me go riding with the men if she could help it; Mrs. Rowton was our housekeeper," she explained to Mr. Tower.

"And is still," added Barry, as the waiter brought another chair, and the three settled down for dinner. "A good old soul! I couldn't be away now if she weren't on the ranch to look after things. I'm over in New Mexico a great deal. Got hold of a silver mine there, and it's been panning out rather well.

"That's why I'm here. I've come to spend some money. You know, before I went West I was in the importing business with my father here in New York. We handled most everything in the line of art, but our specialty was rare laces. When father died, the business had run down somewhat, and, anyhow, I was always something of a crank on outdoor life—played polo whenever I could spare time. So I sold out and bought the ranch on the Rio Verde where you came—"

Barry Oliver's pause brought Bob Tower to himself. While not altogether unmindful of what Barry had been saying, he had been looking at the girl as she bent over the menu, and found himself solemnly debating as to whether it was the pink flush that set off the dimples, or the dimples that gave such intoxicating charm to the rose-petal glow on her delicately rounded cheeks.

Just then she raised her dark eyes for a

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second, and he was struck by lightning. So he gave up his problem about the dimples and the rose-flush, and, deciding that the combination was unspeakably ravishing and enticing, let it go at that.

It was at that particular instant that Barry stopped speaking.

"Yes, I see," stammered Bob. "What are you going to spend money on in New York? Anything particular?"

Barry Oliver made sure that the waiter was out of hearing, and replied, in a confidential tone that only his sister and Bob Tower could hear:

"Yes. It's some old laces—the Trevelyan collection—that are about as precious as anything in these United States. You hear what I'm telling you. I got on to them from an old padre at a 'dobe mission in the Guadalupe hills in New Mexico. He has some documents in French that tell about a bunch of laces the old monks brought from France about the end of the sixteenth century.

"He told me a long story about how the laces were swiped by some Spaniards, sold in France, and at last found their way to England. Well, never mind about details. I've arranged to buy the lot for cash."

"Then they are in New York now?" queried Bob.

"Sure! And the best of it is I have a customer for them in Los Angeles, a banker—a cranky old chap, but good as gold—who used to know my dad in New York, and who has one of the most wonderful art collections west of the Rockies. He's always adding to it, so when the padre told me his yarn, and I found out where they were, I used the cable and found out I could get them.

"Then I hiked over to Los Angeles, made my deal with the banker, and after fixing up my affairs in Arizona and New Mexico so that they'd run along without me for a while, came down here with Lucy, for business and pleasure combined. I expect to clean up ten thousand dollars on the deal."

"They must be valuable when you can make such a profit as that," remarked Bob, with his eyes on Lucy's dimples. "Are there many pieces?"

"Not so very many. A dozen or so. My man won't get them all at that," answered Barry Oliver, with a nod toward Lucy. "I'm holding out one piece. It's a collar, nearly four hundred years old, that was worn by Catherine de Medici—the famous Medici, you know—and the padre says it's a peach. Lucy gets that collar."

"Isn't that fine, Mr. Tower?" cried Lucy, her eyes glistening. "Barry is a pretty good brother—in some ways," she added, with a mischievous little laugh. "He's promised to bring me my collar this evening."

"Yes. The stuff is at the Z and V pier. The ship came in yesterday. I am to be at the gate at half past eight," went on Barry with a grin. "Sounds all very mysterious, doesn't it? But in these times the government is mighty particular, especially about vessels and what they are doing.

"So the man who will bring the laces out to me, in an ordinary hand-bag, will ask and give a pass-word, and a lot of bunk like that. The bag is worth fifty thousand dollars, you see, and I'm to hand over a certified check for that amount when the bag is passed to me. Secrecy's all right for me. If these laces were talked about, and my customer knew it, blooie; the deal would be all off."

The soup arrived then, and Barry Oliver fell upon it with true Western fervor, so that there was little more conversation on any subject, and none at all about the laces until the next course. Then Barry remarked, while the waiter was momentarily absent:

"There have been other people after these laces, and they would have paid as much as I'm giving. But they were too late."

"Who are the people?" asked Bob.

"Don't know. It was Smithson, the lace importer of West Broadway, who told me, and it was an agent he didn't know who came to him about it. There's always so much mystery about big purchases of art objects. Why, I'm not allowed to give the name of the Los Angeles banker I'm dealing with, even to my own family. Lucy doesn't know for sure who he is."

"I suppose I may guess, mayn't I?" she

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laughed, her transparently delicate little finger pointing mockingly at her brother as she picked up her fish fork. "There aren't so many bankers in Los Angeles with the largest collection, you know."

Barry ignored this—for the waiter was bobbing about again—and the dinner went on to the end with careless conversation and merriment, and Bob Tower making no effort to resist the fascination of this demure, self-possessed beauty, who had evolved wonderfully from the leggy little girl he remembered six years before.

"Hello!" exclaimed Barry briskly, looking at his watch. "It's nearly eight o'clock. I'll have to go. By the way, Bob, it's lucky we found each other to-night. Here's my sister, and—"

"Yes, it *is* very lucky," interrupted Bob with enthusiasm, as he watched a dimple disappear from the middle of her cheek and come up again at the corner of the ripe cherry mouth.

"Yes," continued Barry, pushing back his chair, "I should have had to let her stay up alone in our rooms while I'm away. But, now, if you'll do me a favor, you might hang around with her down here, listening to the music and doing the lah-de-dah in Peacock Alley till I get back. It ought not to take more than an hour. Then I'll show you something in the way of laces that I bet you never saw before."

Do him a favor! Gosh!

What Bob really said was: "If Miss Oliver thinks I sha'n't bore her, I shall be delighted."

She gave him a reassuring smile, when Barry, struck by a sudden misgiving, asked with some anxiety:

"It won't interfere with your military duties, will it, Bob? I'd forgotten for the moment that Uncle Sam has a mortgage on your time."

"Don't worry about that, Barry," replied Bob, as he offered his arm to Lucy. "I have several days' leave. There's some business connected with the estate that requires my presence—signing things, and so forth—and I'm in New York to enjoy myself."

They all walked together to the lobby. Then Barry waved his hand and strode away for the taxicab he had ordered. They heard him outside the door, roaring at somebody because the cab was not there, when Bob felt the girl's fingers tighten on his arm as she whispered earnestly:

"Look at that man over there—the one with the long nose—the young man in evening dress. See how he's watching Barry!"

He looked down at her, and the fire in her dark eyes made his head spin as he answered: "I see him. Not a very pleasant-looking chap, is he? Why do you suppose he's watching Barry? Jove! He's hurrying out. What do you know about him? Anything?"

"I don't know him," she replied hurriedly, her breath coming in gasps. "But he's been near Barry and me so many times in the two days we've been here that I can hardly believe it's always an accident."

"Of course it isn't," broke in Bob. "This town is full of crooks of all kinds, and many of them wear respectable clothes. If this man has been hanging around your brother, it must have been that he was trying to overhear something Barry was saying."

He stopped and stared frowningly through the glass door.

"Pardon me! Could you go up to your rooms?" he asked, with an agitation that was seven-tenths anger. "I find that I have to go out. It's important. It is dreadful to leave you so abruptly. But—"

He had not finished, but ran to the door to call sharply for a taxi.

"Cab, sir?" chirped the starter. "Yes, sir—here y' are, sir!"

Bob had one foot already in the cab when the vision of the girl with peachlike cheeks, duskily flashing eyes and a mouth wickedly enticing, made him stop and look around irresolutely.

"Lord! I can't leave her like this!" he muttered. "It's outrageous. I'll have to go and tell her. But time is so precious—"

He turned to go into the hotel when his way was blocked by a slight, undulating figure in a long, black cloak, and a white hand lay on his sleeve.

"I beg your—" blurted out Bob. Then, as the red-gold of her hair shone through a black lace shawl, and the light from the

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doorway revealed her piquant features, he stammered: "Miss Oliver! I—"

"I'm going with you—if I may!" she interrupted. "Please don't argue."

There was an intoxicating touch of royal authority in her low tones. He took her hand to assist her into the cab, and as they slipped along over the asphalt, Bob thrilled as he felt her soft, warm bosom against his arm. Lucy, perhaps unconsciously, had not removed her ungloved hand from the strong clasp of the handsome young artilleryman. Well, Venus could not resist Mars, and mythological history, like any other kind, repeats itself.

"Don't let that other cab out of sight!" warned Bob through the front window.

"Not on your life!" was the driver's confident reply.

"Isn't this fun!" whispered the girl, though her serious tone belied the light words.

"Fun's no name for it!" replied Bob, as he ventured to press her hand.

CHAPTER II.

THE WHARF-RAT.

DOWN to the foot of Fifth Avenue glided the taxicab in which sat Barry Oliver, followed, at a distance of some fifty feet, by the vehicle tenanted by Lucy and Bob Tower.

Under the Washington Arch and through the Square, then to the right, zigzagging along the crooked and gloomy streets of Greenwich Village, until the first cab stopped along the curb in deep shadow, with the gates of a steamship pier facing it across the broad highway of the river-front.

The driver of the second taxi had been a "night-hawk" in the old hansom cab days; therefore, he had perfected "shadowing" to a fine art. As Barry Oliver's cab slowed down and stopped, the second one did the same, shutting off its lights and coming to a halt in a particularly dark part of the deserted street, twenty yards behind.

There had been little conversation between Bob and the girl. Both had been too intent on keeping the first cab in sight. There had been no remark by either as to the reason of this sudden adventurous dash after Barry Oliver, but each knew that the other believed some unknown peril threatened Barry, whether he was aware of it or not.

"I thought Barry said he was to go to the gate in his cab to get that bag of laces," whispered Lucy, standing up and peering through the front window. "I don't understand why he is walking all that distance. Don't you think we ought to get out and follow him? Suppose somebody jumps from one of those doorways behind him!"

She pushed open the door of the cab, but Bob held her back.

"Nobody will attack him until he has the bag in his hand," he said—and there was a quiet force in his voice which Lucy, as a Western girl, knew meant the speaker was on edge. "Before that, we'll be close by. Barry saved my life once in Arizona. Do you think it possible that I would allow myself to be too late if he should need help? Ah, there he goes! He's knocking at the gate."

Barry stood close to the gate for two or three minutes, and Bob understood that he was talking to somebody inside, though he could not see at that distance. Suddenly Barry turned away and walked swiftly back to the cab.

"Has he got the laces?" asked the girl eagerly.

"No. Evidently he went to find out whether the bag was there before driving up," answered Bob Tower, his eyes fastened on the cab in front. "Yes. There goes the cab!" He spoke sharply to his own driver: "Wait till the other taxi is at the gate. Then go to the corner of this cross street. Get that?"

"Sure!" was the driver's easy response. "That all?"

"No, that's only the beginning," snapped Bob. "As soon as one of those gates opens, ever so little, you swing around and get as near the other taxi as you can—as if you were passing. But when you are close to it slow down. Understand?"

"I get you!" with a slow Mephistophelian wink. "That's the whole trick, is it?"

"That's all at present," said Bob Tower curtly. As an officer, accustomed to giving

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commands, he resented the cabman's off-hand tone and manner. "But there'll be other orders later, and they may come at any moment. Be ready to pick them up like a flash. You'll have no time to think, mind!"

"*Who's* thinking?" rejoined the driver scornfully. "*I* never think. I have enough to do to drive and watch the traffic-cops without *thinking*. T' hell with *thinking!*"

Bob did not reply. He was occupied in following the movements of the other cab. To his surprise, the wharf gate opened wide and Barry's taxi went in.

Lucy placed an eager hand on Bob Tower's arm. Lord! How it made the hot blood leap within him!

"Barry said the man would bring the bag out to him, didn't he?" she asked. Then, apprehensively: "I hope there's nothing wrong."

"I don't think so. Just a little change of arrangements. You know what Barry said—that there's a lot of mystery around the shipping wharves these days."

She looked up at his face, faintly illumined by the street lights, and again she felt relieved to know that there was somebody with her who would be able to cope with the menace that neither had mentioned to the other, but which had prompted both of them to come on this seemingly uncalled-for trip.

There might be nothing, but if there were, then this young soldier would undoubtedly be as reliable as any of the rough-and-ready men of the plains with whom she had been familiar all her life.

Their cab, which had drawn up at the street corner, suddenly began to describe a wide circle, as Bob Tower had ordered, and they saw the other taxi coming out of the gateway.

Bob looked swiftly about the spacious thoroughfare. No vehicle was in sight save the two cabs, which were maneuvering like a pair of very wary boxers in a ring, going around each other without approaching.

Suddenly the cab containing Bob and the girl shot over toward the other, and the two were parallel, but going in different directions.

At the moment of passing, Bob glimpsed Barry holding to him, on his knees, a large, yellow suit-case, which was, of course, the bag of laces. Barry had his cab to himself, and from the way he was guarding his precious bag, it was obvious he fully appreciated its value.

"What now?" demanded the hoarse voice of the driver through the window. "Did I slow down enough?"

"Yes," replied Bob. "Get back to the hotel, with the other cab in sight, the way you came down. There'll be a five-dollar bill in it for you, outside your fare."

Before the driver could reply, and simultaneously with a low cry from Lucy, Bob roared to the man to put on power.

"Get to that other cab!" he shouted. "Don't you *see?*"

From somewhere—or nowhere—a low-built automobile, of the roadster type, had shot into the spacious square in front of the shipping pier, and was bearing down on Barry Oliver's taxicab.

"It's that same man!" cried Lucy. "Oh, stop him, please!"

"I'm going to," replied Bob Tower briefly. "Hurry up, you!" to his driver.

"Oh, what t' hell! How can I?" grumbled the cabman. "With that gink right in the way?"

The "gink" was the slim young man who had halted the page with the card for Barry Oliver in the café of the Hotel Supremacy, and of whom Lucy had spoken as hanging around her brother so much.

There was no mistaking the white face, with its big nose, as they showed for an instant in the glare of his own headlights, when he swung from the motor-car and dashed for the taxi in which sat Barry Oliver, hugging his bag of rare laces.

The man had a light overcoat over his evening clothes.

He had engineered his car so that not only was it in the way of Bob Tower's taxi, but had stopped so abruptly that the other cab had run into it, though not very hard.

It was the noise of the collision that had startled Lucy Oliver. Then Bob saw that his driver was bottled up by the sprawling roadster, and he leaped out and darted after the big-nosed man.

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It looked like a most audacious hold-up.

He saw the man, without waiting to see whether his machine was damaged, jump for the door of Barry's cab, fling it open, and dive inside.

But this was not all. Thieves seemed to be on all sides. Just as the big-nosed young man reached the cab door, another figure came suddenly into the open space from the shadow of the wharf building and hurled itself at the opposite door.

It was Lucy Oliver who first saw the newcomer, as she jumped from her cab to follow Bob. She had the faculty of quick observation, and at a glance she noted that he was short, of a wiry build, wore a flashily cut sack coat much the worse for wear, and had a bullet-head half buried in a hangdog-looking cloth cap. From beneath the vizor of the cap, sharp, ratlike eyes glistened in the blue-white light of an overhead arc-lamp.

Without possessing any first-hand knowledge of New York's underworld, the girl's instinct told her that this fellow was one of the human vermin that haunt the waterfronts of all large cities, the individual of which is known to the police as a "wharf-rat."

Before either Bob or Lucy could get to Barry's cab, there was a short cry that resolved itself into a groan, from within, followed by a scuffling that rocked the vehicle.

"Stay back there!" shouted Bob to Lucy.

He could not stop to see whether she obeyed him. He had other pressing business on hand.

Smashing his way into the taxi, Bob seized the collar of the big-nosed man's light overcoat with one hand, and raised the other, knotted into a formidable fist, ready for action.

Before he could strike, an agonized protest from his prisoner rang through the still night air.

"Hold on, Mr. Tower—one moment! You have the wrong man! I'm Mr. Oliver's friend!"

Bob hesitated, but held his fist ready, as he took a hasty survey of the scene in the cab.

Lying back in the seat, semiunconscious, was Barry Oliver, while the big-nosed one, who had been about to jump out of the opposite door when Bob Tower pulled him back by the scruff of his neck, lay helpless across Barry's knees.

"Where's that bag?" shouted Bob in a fury. "Tell me quick, or I'll pound you to powder, and arrest your remains afterward. Where is it?"

He gave his captive an admonitory shake that threatened to loosen all his teeth.

"I—I—" stammered the other, but could get no further.

"Don't lie! Tell me!" insisted Bob, more fiercely than before. "That bag was here a moment ago! Where is it?"

"Gone!" was the gasping reply. "Can't you see? Over there! Crossing the road!"

Bob looked out of the door, just in time to see the wharf-rat, the yellow suit-case swinging in one hand, disappear around the corner, where he was swallowed up in the darkness of the street down which the two taxicabs had come only a few minutes before.

The laces were gone!

CHAPTER III.

THE PATTERN PRINTS.

ONE look satisfied Bob that Barry Oliver was coming to himself, and he jumped out of the cab, in full cry after the insolent thief who had stolen the precious bag under the very nose of its owner.

But the fugitive knew his stamping-ground too well to be overhauled easily. Bob Tower never could say into which of the many dark entries—some with doors closed and others wide open—the fellow slipped. All he did know was that, after diving into three doorways in rapid succession, without hearing or seeing anything, he came out of the third one right into the arms of an extremely solid policeman.

"Hey, young fellow!" began the patrolman haughtily. Then, as he recognized an army officer's cap and uniform, his hand went up in salute. Still cautious, however, and taking nothing for granted, he awaited an explanation.

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"I'm trying to find a thief, officer!" said Bob, his breath a little shorter than usual from his exertion. "He stole a bag from my friend in that taxicab down there, and came up this street."

"What was in the bag?" demanded the policeman, bringing a note-book from his pocket.

"A lot of rare, old laces, worth fifty thousand dollars," replied Bob, with some hesitation.

Down went this in the note-book. Then the policeman asked, even while he wrote:

"Got a description of the thief? Did you see him?"

"Yes. But we don't want the police to take up this thing. At least, I don't think my friend—"

"What's his name?" interrupted the patrolman bruskly, without looking up from his book.

"Barry Oliver. Owns a ranch in Arizona and a silver mine in New Mexico. Staying at the Hotel Supremacy," replied Bob, irritated at all this red tape. "My name is Tower—Robert Tower. I live with my mother, Fifth Avenue, near Seventy-Second Street."

As Bob gave his identity as the son of the late multi-millionaire, Robert Tower, the policeman looked up from his book and said, "Thank you!" He had not been outwardly impressed by the information that Barry Oliver was a very wealthy Westerner—as no doubt he was, being the owner of a ranch and silver mine—but when he knew that the young man before him belonged to the influential Tower family, why, that was different.

The policeman's tone was almost coaxing now as he repeated his question, "Can you give me a description of the thief?"

"A short, wiry young fellow, with a cap on, and he seemed to limp a little," replied Bob, adding: "I am not sure about his limping, but it looked to me as if he ran a little unevenly."

The policeman hastily wrote something more in his book, and remarked, with a satisfied grunt: "Kid Griffin! That's who it is. He's a boxer—a kind of a one. Goes on in prelims at some of the clubs around Tenth Avenue and Forty-Second Street. Knocked off the platform one night and hurt his knee. Makes him wabble sometimes, when there's humidity in the air. Now—"

"Look here, officer," broke in Bob impatiently. "Don't make any move in this until you hear from me? Of course, if you get your hands on the bag, have it sent right up to Mr. Oliver at the Supremacy Hotel. But he doesn't want any publicity. I may say there will be a suitable reward—"

"That's all right, captain;" broke in the officer, with a virtuous wave of the note-book as he restored it to an inner pocket. "I wasn't thinking about that. But the regulations require me to report anything on my post. If I see the Kid, he'll cough up that bag, you can bet on that," he added, with gruff confidence. "As sure as my name's Kelly."

"I guess it wouldn't be any use my hunting him myself around here?" suggested Bob, looking about him.

"Not a chance," replied the policeman. "There are twenty ways for the Kid to make his getaway if he went into any of these houses, and he might come out on any one of four streets. Still, you never can tell. I might—"

"Well, good night, officer—Mr. Kelly," interrupted Bob. "If you have anything to report, you'll remember it's Mr. Barry Oliver, at the Hotel Supremacy."

"Sure! Good night, captain!"

The patrolman clumped up the street, and Bob hurried down to rejoin Barry Oliver and Lucy. He could see the roadster behind the two taxicabs—they having extricated themselves from their tangle—so he felt pretty sure the long-nosed, slim young man had not departed.

As Bob came closer to the taxicabs he saw Barry hurrying to meet him.

"Didn't you get the fellow?" was Barry's eager question. "The durned coyote! Got me with my head down! Dropped me like a yearling calf under a sledge-hammer! I didn't know at first who it was struck me. Would have bet a silver-trimmed saddle it was Jones. But that was because I didn't see anybody till I came out of my trance, and then I had a flash of Lucy giving him

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the evil eye. Holy cattle! She's got a look like a poisoned rattler when she don't like a man!"

"Jones? That's his name, eh?" observed Bob thoughtfully.

"Yep! William Jones. He has a bachelor apartment just a few blocks from the Supremacy, and he's often around the hotel. Independently wealthy! Comes from the South—New Orleans, I think he said."

"Ah! I wondered why I didn't know him if he was a New Yorker!" remarked Bob. Then, before Barry could speak, he added: "I was on the heels of the fellow with the bag, but he got away. I'm told his name is Kid Griffin."

"It is? Who told you?" came the instant question.

"A policeman. He'll be on the lookout for this Griffin and the laces on his own individual account, but I told him you would not want any publicity in the matter."

"That's right, Bob. You remembered what I told you about the Los Angeles banker who wants the laces, eh? Well, this Jones is a bright fellow, and he says he is going to get them back for me. See what you think of him."

"I will," was the dry response as they came up to the taxicab and found Lucy Oliver listening attentively to Jones's rather florid recital of what had taken place in the cab.

"There's the boy that got me!" cried Barry, pointing to a black object on the floor of the cab. "A man's sock half full of sand. Knocked me loco without leaving a mark. Why, it beats a gun in some ways, 'cause it doesn't make any noise."

William Jones gingerly picked up the sand-bag with the tips of his fingers and immediately dropped it in disgust.

"It's the kind of weapon only the lowest criminal would use," he declared, the end of his nose coming down over his hard mouth to express his loathing. "I know something about this kind of thing, because I have made a psychological study of criminals. It's a hobby of mine.

"Besides, I may say I have been fortunate enough to unravel two or three crime mysteries — working independently of the police, of course—and I've done it by applying the simplest rules of common sense to circumstances more or less unusual. You follow me?" he asked of Bob, but with a corner of his eye on Lucy, as if to note what she thought of it.

"What were you doing in Mr. Oliver's cab when he was sand-bagged?" asked Bob Tower bluntly.

"That's very simple," answered Jones carelessly. "I had business in this part of the city—at one of the wharves—and was driving along, with my mind on my affairs, when I saw two taxicabs, one seemingly following the other. At the same moment a man came sneaking across the road in a way that could only mean mischief, and I saw that he was making for one of the cabs.

"On the spur of the moment I swung my car around, jumped out, and ran to the cab just as the scoundrel burst in the other door. He had delivered his blow at Mr. Barry, and I was trying to reach him when this gentleman—I have not the pleasure of knowing his name—grabbed me from behind. The thief got away!"

There was a mild suggestion of reproof, as if Mr. Jones were sure he would have caught the rascal but for Bob Tower's interference. But he added quickly: "Of course you did not know, Mr.—"

"Captain Tower!" supplied Lucy briefly.

"Ah! Thank you! Captain Tower did not know. He may even have fancied I was a thief—"

"I did," confirmed Bob Tower uncompromisingly.

"You are candid," said Jones with a sickly smile. "Well, to show Captain Tower how entirely he was mistaken, I have offered my aid to Mr. Oliver to run down the rascal, and he has accepted it."

"That's so," acquiesced Barry. "The only question with him was as to whether I could identify the laces. I've told him I could."

"How can you do that, Barry?" asked Lucy incredulously. "You never saw them until to-night. And you weren't inside the gates of the wharf long enough to examine them carefully. I know that, because Mr. Tower and I saw you go in and then come out again about five minutes afterward."

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Barry shook his head wisely as he drew from an outside pocket of his light overcoat a flat package wrapped in brown paper.

"What's that?" demanded the girl.

"I'll show you."

Barry took the trouble to remove the wrapping in the powerful glare of one of the roadster's headlights, and showed his three companions a number of sheets of soft paper, on each of which was stamped in black a pattern of lace or embroidery. The patterns were of different sizes and shapes, and the designs varied also.

Lucy uttered an ejaculation of rapturous delight as she turned over the sheets and examined each in turn.

"Oh, here's a large collar!" she broke out ecstatically. "Isn't this perfectly dear! Just to think of the women in that far-off day being able to make this lovely lace! Better than we can do to-day, and it has lasted since. When was this made, Barry?"

Barry enjoyed his sister's admiration as much as he did the beauty of the laces—and, as an art dealer in the old days, he was a connoisseur, too.

"It was done in fifteen hundred and something," he replied. "I forget the exact date. Durn that ornery, cattle-stealing crook! The date of each piece of lace is sewed on it. But the thief has got away with the whole business, and I can only guess, within a hundred years or so, when the different examples were produced."

"Examples?" said Lucy. "Is that what you call them?"

"Art jargon, Lucy," explained Barry soberly. "Lordy! How the old talk comes back to me after all these years, when I get hold of such a collection as this. And to think that a dirty, little, sneaking crook has them at this moment! By the way, Lucy, that is the Catherine de Medici collar that goes to you. I know that one, anyhow."

"Goes to me?" almost screamed the girl, as her dark eyes sparkled with excitement, while a deep flush of disappointment spread over her dimpled cheeks. "And is that stolen, too?"

"It most certainly is," returned her brother, scowling, as he wrapped up the pattern-prints into their original flat package. "You didn't think the contemptible skunk would pick it out and leave it, even if he knew it was to be your special property! Sneak-thieves aren't built that way!"

"Well, I've seen that miserable creature, and I should know him again. If ever I meet him, I'll—"

She clenched a little hand that could fling from the saddle, and had flung—a lariat seventy feet, stopping a two-year-old steer as dead in his tracks as if he had suddenly been spiked to the earth in all four feet. Kid Griffin, tough as he was, would assuredly have been impressed if he had heard Lucy Oliver's words and seen her blazing eyes at that moment.

And whether she suspected it or not, Lucy roped Bob Tower, as she said this, more securely than ever.

William Jones had observed, with an interest he could hardly conceal, that Barry Oliver replaced the package of patterns in the same outside pocket of his overcoat. Perhaps he was afraid Barry might lose them from such an insecure place. He said nothing about that, however. Instead, he purred in his most persuasive accents:

"If you will permit me to drive you back to the Hotel Supremacy in my car, Mr. Oliver, you can discharge your cabman, and we can talk over the case on the way."

Perhaps because Mr. Jones *was* so persuasive, Lucy stepped forward and placed her veto on the proposition in unmistakable terms.

"Mr. Oliver will go back with me—and Captain Tower," she ruled as she took her brother's hand. "Come on, Barry!"

Jones shrugged and smiled. Then, bowing to the girl and saying calmly, "I will meet you at the hotel," he climbed into his roadster and sped away.

CHAPTER IV.

A BRIEF MESSAGE.

BARRY OLIVER, Bob Tower, and Lucy, all had been, at least, half an hour in the gold-furnitured, many-mirrored drawing-room, which, with a private dining-

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room, a boudoir for Lucy, and two bedrooms made up the suite at the Hotel Supremacy, for which Barry said he was paying the price of a Dakota farm every twenty-four hours, when William Jones was announced, and a moment afterward entered with apologies which fairly dripped contriteness.

"I had an important letter to write," he explained suavely, "so was obliged to run around to my rooms for a few minutes. Then I left my car at the garage, which also took a little time. I can't tell you how sorry I am to keep you waiting."

The big nose dilated and contracted convulsively, and the numberless little lines at the corners of his eyes deepened as he spoke. His whole physiognomy expressed, in its own way, how desolated he was.

Barry Oliver bounced out of his chair, rolling an unlighted cigar over and over in his mouth, and strode up and down the room irritably.

"That's all right," he broke in. "The question is: What can you do about this robbery?"

"You give me full charge of the case—to trace the theft without interference from anybody?" asked Jones, eyelids drooping over his furtive, yellow eyes.

"Sure! The bridle's off the horse, and you can swing your rope as far as you like, so long as you round up these laces. See here, Jones! Let me tell you something about them that I haven't mentioned to you before. This bunch of laces is known as the Trevelyan collection, and there are other people after it besides my customer in Los Angeles."

The eyes of the pale-faced listener glistened, and the twitching of the long nose became more marked, though obviously he was trying to control his features.

"It is all the more desirable, then, that we should recover them at once," he purred. "Will you give me that package of pattern-prints?"

"What?"

Barry barked this, and a scowl of suspicion darkened his big, bronzed face as he champed savagely on his cigar.

"You see, I shall need something by which to identify the laces," protested Jones silkily. "Miss Oliver understands that, I'm sure," he continued, smirking across the room at Lucy. "I think you nodded, Miss Oliver. Did you not?" he asked.

"She did nothing of the kind," interposed Bob, unable to keep his tongue quiet, although he did repress an almost irresistible temptation to try the toe of his heavy army boot on the smirker's person. "It doesn't seem to me that you need those prints. If you have any idea of where the laces are, you will know they are Mr. Oliver's when you see them."

Bob Tower spoke in the incisive tones of a military man, biting off his words as he frowned at the propitiatory Jones.

Barry Oliver said nothing just then. But he brought the package of pattern-prints from his overcoat and spread them out loosely on the gold-legged marquetry table. All four of them gathered about the table and looked with involuntary admiration.

"Laces are very much alike to a person who has never studied them closely," remarked Jones, addressing Barry and Lucy and ignoring Bob. "I do not believe I should know these from any others of about the same design and general appearance. So far as I can see the patterns are not unique."

"The workmanship is, though," replied Barry. "My customer in Los Angeles would not be deceived for an instant by any imitations. As for the designs, they are different from any others in little ways that an expert can detect at once."

"And this customer of yours knows the designs?" queried Jones softly.

"Of course he does. He wouldn't be offering me sixty thousand dollars before he sees them," replied Barry grimly. "As a banker, he has a proper appreciation of the value of money, as well as of rare laces. He has seen the Trevelyan collection in London."

"Well, I hardly see how I can expect success unless I have the patterns," insisted Jones.

"Look at them well now," snorted Barry, still chewing at his cigar. "If you're smart enough to corral the thief and get the laces back, you ought to be able to carry the look of them in your head. I don't aim to

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let these prints out of my hands. I need them so that I can run my brand on the laces when I put them side by side. I've *got* to hold them."

"Do you know who the other persons are who want the Trevelyan laces?" asked Jones carelessly as he bent over the prints.

"Haven't the least idea. But the purser of the vessel, who did the business for me in London and brought them over, was told by the owner—he's an earl, or a duke, or something, and he's selling a lot of his stuff to help his country win the war—that same wealthy American had cabled an offer to him. But I had the laces cinched, and the other gent, whoever he is, doesn't get 'em."

Barry pitched his mangled cigar into the open fireplace, and he didn't observe the fleeting grin of satisfaction in his questioner's pasty face as he admitted he didn't know who the "wealthy American" was. But Bob and Lucy both saw it and exchanged a quick look of inquiry. What did that grin mean?

"No," declared Barry positively. "I can't let you have the prints to take away. Look at them all you like here."

"Well," exclaimed Jones after a pause, during which he seemed to be studying the prints, "I shall have to do as well as I can without them! I'll say good night, and as soon as I have anything to report I'll let you know."

He had not taken off his overcoat, and, picking up his hat from a chair, he bowed in his usual extravagant fashion, tried to catch Lucy's eye and failed, and, flinging back defiantly Bob Tower's menacing glance, slipped out of the room.

"Say, Bob, what do you think of that citizen?" demanded Barry, taking another cigar from a box in the dining-room and coming back to gather up the prints. "Suppose he can do anything?"

"I shouldn't wonder," replied Bob. "He seems confident. Perhaps he knows more than he cares to confess."

Barry stopped in the act of putting the new cigar in his mouth and stared hard at Bob, as he said slowly: "You don't mean that you think this Jones is a crook?"

"I don't say that," was the cautious response. "Have you his address?"

"By the jumping Jim Jamieson, no!" ejaculated Barry, bringing his fist down on the table. "I forgot to ask that. He's living in bachelor-apartments not far from here, he told me, but I never thought to ask where. However, if he has anything to tell, he'll come, I guess. When he does, I'll—"

The telephone bell interrupted him, and he snatched up the receiver impatiently to bellow a fierce "Well?"

It was the hotel office announcing a caller. As Barry listened, his ruddy, tanned face seemed to lose a little of its healthy color, and Bob thought his voice shook as he sent down the order: "Bring him up!"

He put down the telephone and turned to Lucy with a blank expression.

"What do you know about that?" he gasped. "It's Colonel Coleberry."

"Good gracious, Barry!" she returned, her cheeks flushing with astonishment. "I thought he was in Los Angeles."

"So did I. But you never know what that old cuss will do. Now the fat's in the fire for sure." He turned to Bob Tower. "It's my man who is buying the laces. He asked me not to mention his name. But now he's here, of course it can't be helped. The colonel ain't the sort of man to hide himself when he's away from home."

Barry hastily put the prints in a drawer in the table and stuck the cigar, which had not yet been in his mouth, into a waistcoat pocket. Then he walked up and down, striking a huge fist into the palm of his other hand. He was worried, and, if he had been on his Arizona ranch, would have saddled up and ridden twenty miles into the hills to compose himself. As it was, he could only take the relief of an ordinary city man.

A knock at the door, a quick "Come!" from Barry as he walked over to welcome his visitor, and the next moment he was shaking hands with a well-built, elderly man of medium height, who stood very straight, and whose white mustache and imperial, as well as his white pompadoured hair, gave him a military aspect that was emphasized by his brusk manner of speech. A roar—as leonine as he could make it—was his ordinary tone.

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"Hello, Barry! Didn't expect to see me, I suppose?" were his first words. "Down here for the Bankers' Convention. Didn't have to come, but thought I would. Mrs. Coleberry's with me. We're staying in this hotel. Where's my laces?"

"They're all right," jerked out Barry desperately. "Glad to see you, colonel!"

Colonel Coleberry pulled at one end of his waxed mustache fiercely.

"Don't lie! You're not glad. You don't care a damn about me, and I know it! All you want is to get the money for those laces, and then I can go plumb to—"

He caught sight of Lucy just in time, and, striding forward, held out his hand and gave her fingers a squeeze that he considered rather severe, but which had no effect on the girl's firm flesh.

"Glad to see you, Lucy!" he snapped out. "Yes, I *am* glad. Know why? Because you're pretty, and I like to look at pretty things. Jove, but you were an awkward, gangly youngster when I first knew you! But you've improved—wonderfully. That school in San Francisco has smoothed out the angles and made you a nicely-rounded, well-balanced young woman. You look more intelligent than you used to."

"Thank you, colonel!" laughed Lucy.

"By George, the dimples are there still, I see!" went on the colonel appreciatively. "How the devil do girls get dimples—that is, some of them? I never could understand—"

He broke off, and, bringing his heels together with a click, saluted. He had just seen Bob Tower, who came forward from behind the door at this moment, and who returned the salute with corresponding formality.

"Captain Tower, of the Field Artillery!"

It was Lucy who introduced him, for Barry, worrying about the lost laces, had overlooked Bob altogether.

"The artillery, eh?" boomed the colonel. "Big guns! Well, well! They are the babies that 'll tell in this war—those and the planes. I wish I were young enough to take a hand in it myself. But I'm a veteran of the sixties — Chancellorsville, Mission Ridge, Gettysburg—and I'm out of it now. They wouldn't even let me go to Cuba twenty years ago. Talked about my being too old.

"Bah! A man's never too old to fight, if he feels like doing it. I'm seventy-seven, and I'd lick Barry here, if he got me mad, and he knows it! Where are those Trevelyan laces, Barry?"

He turned away from Bob and Lucy, and, throwing his broad-brimmed soft hat on a chair, glared at Barry savagely.

This did not mean that Colonel Coleberry was angry. Both as a soldier and banker he considered it good policy to be regarded as rough and gruff, that was all.

"Laces, colonel?" stammered Barry, his demeanor much less determined than usual. "Well—er—I didn't expect you here in New York. I intended to deliver them to you in Los Angeles."

"That's all right," snapped the colonel. "But you told me they would be in New York not later than the twenty-second. Here's the twenty-fourth. If I'm willing to take them now and pay for them, so much the better for you, isn't it? I'll have the responsibility of getting them to California, and that saves you some trouble. Where are they?"

Colonel Coleberry stroked his white imperial and twisted the ends of his mustache as he fixed a censorious eye on Barry. The colonel was accustomed to seeing his employees jump when he issued an order, and he carried the same ideas into his dealings with others when he could. The look he gave the ranchman now was calculated to burn up a person of at all a timid disposition.

But Barry Oliver was not timid, and now that he had recovered from the shock of his surprise at seeing the old fire-eater in New York, when he was supposed to be on the Pacific Coast, he was prepared to hold his own.

"The laces are not ready," he said quietly, but with a hint of mischief in his low, deep tones. "I'll have them in Los Angeles by the time I promised them."

"What the devil—" began the colonel furiously.

"Hush!"

Barry said this in a sharp tone, while he held up a warning finger. The interjection

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and the gesture were too much for Colonel Coleberry. He sank into a chair and mouthed inaudibly. He could not find words that would fit his wrath.

Bob Tower and Lucy looked on in amazement, with some fear that the old gentleman would have a fit. But Barry Oliver knew him better, and he was not afraid of anything of the kind. So he went on coolly:

"There is no use your blustering, colonel. You know you're in the wrong—as a business man you know it, and as a soldier you ought to be willing to stand things going against you. If I have the laces ready for you before you leave New York, I'll let you know. If not, I'll deliver them in Los Angeles. Now, let's talk about something else."

He smiled. But Colonel Coleberry did not respond. Instead, he got up slowly, picked up his hat, and marched to the door. There he turned and said in choked tones:

"I'll be in New York a week, staying in this hotel. Let me hear from you soon."

"Perhaps in a day or two, colonel," was Barry Oliver's cheerful reply.

"Very well. Good night!"

He stalked out, but before the door closed was back with a labored smile, twisting his mustache and lifting his imperial to one side.

"Mrs. Coleberry will be glad to see you, Barry and Lucy, and you, too, Captain Tower," he said pleasantly. "Drop in on us to-morrow, won't you, and we'll have dinner together. I forget the number of our rooms, but the clerk will tell you. Good night!" And the door closed.

"Good night, you durned old blank cartridge!" laughed Bob Barry to the closed door. Then, turning to Bob, he added seriously: "All the same, I wish I could hand him those Trevelyan laces before he goes home."

There was a knock at the door.

"Jumping cats!" ejaculated Barry, "is he back again? Come in!" he roared.

It was a hall attendant, and he handed to Barry a small folded note.

"It's for Captain Tower," explained the man. "The clerk said he was in your rooms, Mr. Oliver."

Barry gave the man the tip he evidently was waiting for, and dismissed him, passing the note to Bob with the other hand.

Bob Tower read aloud all the words the paper contained, written in lead pencil:

"Donovan's saloon on that same street.
"KELLY."

CHAPTER V.

AT DONOVAN'S.

WHEN William Jones left the Oliver suite in the Hotel Supremacy he hurried out of the hotel and walked swiftly to a quiet thoroughfare not more than five blocks away.

It was in one of the cross streets off Fifth Avenue, and in the block where Jones stopped to let himself in with a latch-key there were all the evidences of its having been an exclusive, fashionable byway in the old days, some fifteen or twenty years ago.

But the brownstone houses, with their imposing entrances and stained-glass fanlights, had degenerated. They were now used as homes for single men, mostly clerks with modest incomes. Some of them were frankly boarding-houses, where meals were served at stated hours. All carried an air of down-at-heel gentility, and not one was anything like such an aristocratic edifice as Barry Oliver had been led to suppose sheltered William Jones's "bachelor apartments."

True, Mr. Jones had a bachelor apartment. But there are grades in such establishments, and this one was decidedly of the second or third-class, as such things go in New York.

Perhaps it was as well that the house was so modest since it fitted William Jones's appearance when he came out after being inside fifteen minutes, and in which short time he had shed all the magnificence of the evening-dress that had helped him to seem such a swell at the Hotel Supremacy.

In an unobtrusive dark business suit and soft hat he looked like any ordinary wage-earner in evening rig. He might have been a plumber, machinist, tailor — anything rather than the wealthy idler he had ap-

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peared to be when he stopped the page with Bob Tower's card for Barry Oliver.

Walking over to Sixth Avenue he took an elevated train down-town. At Eighth Street he left the train and went in the general direction of the Hudson River, with the unhesitating gait of a man who knows his way and needs little light to help him.

He swung around corners, took short cuts by way of small "flatiron" streets, and once plunged into an open hallway and came out on an alley that saved him a couple of blocks. He was making good time.

Boldly and surely as he made his way along, William Jones was on the alert for possible followers, and he cast a quick look back occasionally with a skill in hiding the act which suggested his being used to such a precaution.

Finally he reached the rather forbidding street, gloomy and mysterious, ending in the river front, with a perspective of the ship-wharf gates, where the two taxicabs had halted earlier in the evening.

He stopped and listened. He was in front of a row of squalid brick tenements, all very much alike, with decrepit iron railings, rheumatic with rust, guarding the cellar basements and running up by the side of the rotting steps that led to heavy, carved doors—from which most of the paint had blistered off in an eczema of old age—giving upon black, sour-smelling entries.

So far as Jones could tell, after a few moments of intent listening and sharp-looking into the gloom, no one was on the thoroughfare, and he ran swiftly up the steps of the house behind him, which was at one end of the row. The hall in which he found himself may not have been more malodorous than the others, but certainly it was no better, and Jones had to hold his nose to keep from sneezing.

Stepping lightly he went through the hall, past the foot of the staircase, which took half the width of the passage, and stood for a moment listening at the head of a black hole which he knew was the way to the basement.

He had passed two doors on his way, but not a sound had he heard on the other side of them, and if there were people in the basement they were all so quiet that he decided they had gone to bed.

At the very end of the hall, at the rear, was a door with a latch that could be opened from the outside, where a short flight of steps led to a noisome back yard, with a high board fence around its three sides.

But the fence did not delay Jones in the purpose he had in mind—and that he had a distinct purpose his actions all showed—for he went to the fence, and, thrusting his long fingers between one of the cracks, pulled out three of the boards, which, held together in a solid piece, formed a hidden door.

Through the narrow opening he slipped, closing the door behind him. There were no fastenings, reliance being placed on the fact that, unless one knew the secret, he would never suspect that there was a way of getting through the seemingly unbroken barrier.

Jones was now in another yard much like the one he had left. He stood there, in the almost solid blackness, waiting to make sure he was alone, when suddenly a shaft of yellow light shot across from the other side, and he was glad he did not happen to be where the light would strike him. He edged a little further into the darkness, however, and waited.

There was nothing to make him particularly afraid, for the person who came from the lighted doorway was only a little girl with pathetically thin legs and a very scanty frock, who carried a large tin pail.

She had been "rushing the growler." The doorway from which she came, and which she closed after her, led into Donovan's saloon.

This was the explanation of the secret door in the fence. The initiated used it regularly, and a thriving trade was done on Sundays and other forbidden days and nights with thirsty souls who had no respect for the law, and only dreaded the heavy hand of Officer Kelly and his colleagues if they should see what was going on.

Incidentally the fence door was handy for ladies and gentlemen living in the tenements who desired to purchase a can of

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mixed ale now and then without proclaiming their indulgence to the world at large.

Jones remained in the shadow till the child had vanished through the fence with her pail of beer. Then he went over to the saloon door and entered.

He found himself in a small lobby at the back of the barroom, facing a staircase, which he was able to ascend without being observed by Donovan or his bartender.

Donovan's was doing a lively business that night. A large gang of longshoremen had just been paid off.

Up two flights went William Jones. There was a small gas-jet on each floor, and he had no difficulty in finding his way up the steep, uncarpeted stairs to the landing he wanted. A hall led to the rear, and down this he went on tiptoe.

The door at the end was locked, as he found out by softly turning the handle and pushing.

He rapped with his knuckles. There was no answer.

"The pin-headed boob!" muttered Jones to himself.

He glanced over his shoulder and saw that no one was in the hall. But, as an added precaution, he slipped back and looked over the banister, where he had a view of the landing immediately below, as well as of the lobby on the ground floor. Both were empty.

He hurried back to the locked door and put his hand and knee against it in silence. Then, with a sudden shove, into which went more strength than one might have thought was hidden in his slim frame, he sent the door in, breaking away the lock as if it were an eggshell.

William Jones was not big-boned, but he was wiry. In his business he had found it convenient more than once.

As the door went in Jones leaped across the room and very rudely wrapped one of his long hands around the neck of a young man in a sack suit and cloth cap, who had ratlike eyes and a loose mouth, and who evidently had hastily grabbed a yellow suit-case from somewhere, as if he had meant to leave the room abruptly.

Jones noted that the window was open. He knew there was a fire-escape outside.

"You bra..less, pin-headed boob!" hissed Jones. "You'd double-cross me, would you?"

Kid Griffin dropped the suit-case and tried to wriggle loose. But, though the wharf-rat was no weakling, Jones had him at a disadvantage, and he could only remain on his knees, where the other had forced him, and swear sullenly:

"Aw, cut it out, will yer?" he snarled, with an accompaniment of many unrepeatable oaths. "What the hell do yer s'pose yer goin' to git out o' this? I'll hand yer a paste in the jaw when yer git off me neck!"

Jones momentarily tightened his hold, and the shifty eyes of Mr. Griffin jumped forward. Then Jones loosened his grip as he admonished the discomfited Kid in low, rapid tones:

"Where were you going with that suit-case, and what business had you to keep me out of this room just now? You knew who it was. I gave the right signal. Why didn't you open up?"

"It didn't sound right," was the sulky rejoinder. "You didn't have no reason to come breakin' in an' makin' me think the bulls was there. S'elp me, I thought it was Kelly!"

"Kelly?" repeated Jones, with a quick note of dread. "Why should *he* come up here? He hasn't anything on you, has he? He doesn't know anything about this job, unless—"

He hurled Kid Griffin around and transfixed him with his yellow eyes.

"Look here, Kid! If I thought—" He broke off and picked up the suit-case, placing it on the table. "Fix that door!" he ordered sharply. "You are handy enough with tools. Put a bolt on until you can mend the lock, and do it quick, while I look over this stuff."

The wharf-rat scowled as if inclined to disobey. But, thinking better of it when Jones made a move toward him, he opened the door of a large closet, in which were a box of carpenter's tools, together with kitchen utensils of various kinds.

This room, with its gas-stove, a cup and saucer, plates, and the fag-end of a loaf of bread on the table, and a cot-bed in one

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corner, was evidently used as a dining-room as well as a bedchamber.

Kid Griffin went to the door, producing a bolt, as well as the tools he required, while Jones calmly lighted the gas-stove.

He went into the large closet, and, after rummaging about for a few moments, brought forth two flat irons, which he placed on the stove.

The wharf-rat eyed him askance as he measured the bolt against the door-jamb, with a gimlet in his mouth. He took the gimlet out to ask sneeringly:

"Goin' to git up yer laundry? Yer might iron me a couple o' collars an' a shirt while you have yer hand in," he added with clumsy humor. "Gee! You—"

"Fix that door and shut up!" was the short command, and the Kid turned to his task, but still with a furtive eye on Jones.

What Jones did was to take from an inside pocket a roll of paper, which, when he had spread it out on the table, revealed a number of sheets of black carbon inside the white sheets.

He examined the paper as if to see how much there was, and nodded contentedly as he opened the suit-case and brought out the Catherine de Medici collar, which he held up to the light of the gas flaring over his head. Then he drew forth, one by one, several other pieces of exquisite lace in various shapes, smacking his lips appreciatively.

"They're fine, sure!" he murmured. "Fine!"

"You bet!" assented the Kid unemotionally. "But it gits me why any one should go daffy over a gripful of crochet work. Sufferin' Mike, you can git as much as they is in that there bag for fifty cents up at the ten-cent store in Sixt' Avenue, an' it 'd look jest as good!"

Jones replaced the laces in the suit-case and walked over to the door.

"Hurry up with that bolt!" he commanded. "You can work quicker than that when you like. We don't want to have this door open just now."

"Aw! What's bitin' yer?" growled the Kid. "If yer think yer can do it any more faster, why, here's the tools. Git busy!"

Jones did not reply. Instead, he stepped out to the hall and listened, motioning to the other to keep silent. The next minute he darted back into the room, deadly terror in his yellow eyes, thrust the suit-case into the closet, and turned out the gas in the stove. Then he beckoned fiercely to the Kid.

"Bring those tools and come over here—quick!"

The bewildered wharf-rat gathered up the tools and bolt. Hardly had he done so when Jones seized him by the shoulders and hurled him into the closet, closing the door and turning the heavy wooden button.

Not content with that, he picked up a hammer and some long nails that the Kid had left on the floor, and quickly drove a nail in at the bottom of the closet door and two more at the side. He did not mean to let Kid Griffin come out until the door should be opened from the outside.

Hardly had he finished these hasty arrangements when voices sounded in the hall—voices that William Jones knew only too well—and immediately afterward there appeared in the doorway Barry Oliver and Captain Bob Tower, of the Field Artillery!

CHAPTER VI.

THE KID WANTS TO KNOW.

WILLIAM JONES was looking out of the window by this time, and it was not until Bob Tower said, with some excitement, "Who's that at the window?" that he turned around and smiled a welcome, followed by a doleful shake of the head.

"We're too late, I'm sorry to say!" Jones exclaimed, pointing to the open window. "He must have known we were coming and got away."

"Who? What are you talking about?" demanded Barry.

"The thief who stole those laces!" was the reply. "I didn't know *you* were coming. But I had private information that he might be in this house, and I hustled here at once after I left you in the hotel."

"What private information?" asked Bob suspiciously.

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William Jones held up a deprecating hand and smiled protestingly.

"Well, never mind about that," was Barry Oliver's impatient interruption. "What I want to know is, where's that crook with the Trevelyan laces?"

"He went through this window," replied Jones. "But there's a regular maze of back yards, with openings from one to the other, and once he got down the fire-escape he could laugh at us. I broke the door open, and was just in time to see him, with the yellow bag—or suit-case—going down the fire-escape.

"By the time I got the door out of my way and reached the window he was out of sight. By now he is in one of his hiding-places along the wharf, or getting across the river in a skiff. I know the ways of these waterside rascals!"

Bob Tower regarded William Jones steadily and with strong disfavor as he asked:

"You didn't try to follow him through the window?"

"You came just as I was about to go through," replied Jones in a somewhat injured tone. "Not that I believe it would have been of any use. No, gentlemen! He's got away this time. But I'll get him, if you'll leave the case in my hands."

"I'm not leaving the case in any single pair of hands," growled Barry.

"In Arizona, when a gang of greasers come over the border to stampede my cattle, I use every man who can throw a rope or pull a trigger. I don't just leave it to my foreman, and tell him it's up to him—not by a durned sight! We'll all take a hand in this round-up, Mr. Jones!" Then, to Bob, with a shrug: "Well, Bob, we can't blame Kelly."

"Kelly!" was Jones's inaudible comment. Now he knew how it was they had come to Donovan's.

The two newcomers had advanced into the room and were looking around curiously. Barry touched one of the irons and withdrew his hand quickly with a swear-word.

"Damn that iron, it's hot!"

"Yes," said Jones smoothly. "In a place of this kind you often find hot irons."

"Why?" was Bob Tower's short query.

"To iron out marks on dry-goods, and especially silks, velvets, and laces," returned Jones promptly. "They use a certain acid, and when they put a hot iron over it it takes out the marks, so that nothing can be seen. It's wonderful! This fellow probably works the wharves and gets hold of a lot of imported stuff, so that he's in the habit of using irons."

"And you think he was getting the marks out of my laces?" said Barry angrily. "The pizen coyote! You're sure he took the bag with him?"

"I saw it in his hand as he went down the fire-escape and across the yard."

"And you couldn't have caught him?" threw in Bob quietly as he pulled at the nailed-up closet door, after turning the wooden button. "I wonder what's in here—loot?"

"Well, not the laces, anyhow. I saw them go."

The deliberation with which William Jones made this remark conveyed nothing of the trepidation that had set his usually well-controlled pulses galloping and deepened all the little wrinkles in his sallow face. But, in his profession, in which he lived by his wits—and the comparative absence of them in others—William Jones had learned to hide his real feelings on most occasions. This was a ticklish moment, and he knew that he could pass it only by affecting the utmost unconcern.

Bob Tower continued to pull at the door and tried to loosen the two nails at the side with his fingers, but without effect.

"Let me try!" volunteered Barry as he twisted at one of the nails. "No," he grunted, after a moment or two of ineffectual labor. "They are in to stay. Oh, well! What do we care what's in there so long as it's not my laces? Now, Mr. Jones, what do you propose?" he demanded, swinging around to face the coldly-perspiring young man. "We had information that this fellow, Kid Griffin, would be in this house, and Donovan, down-stairs, told us which was his room."

"He did?" Jones blurted this out angrily before he could control himself. Then he added easily: "He didn't tell *me*. I had

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to find this room without his help. You ask me what I propose," he went on. "I think the better thing to do will be to leave this place and hunt somewhere else. If you'll trust me with the case for this one night—even if it isn't the way Mr. Oliver runs things on his ranch," he added with a tinge of sarcasm, "I'll try to have some sort of satisfactory report by to-morrow."

Barry Oliver turned on him swiftly, and his gray eyes seemed to penetrate the soul of William Jones, so that he squirmed uncomfortably in spite of his assumed assurance.

"Have you any reason to believe you'll have such a report?" demanded Barry metallically.

"Yes. I am in hopes I can trace this man you call Kid Griffin to his hole. Then he'll give up the laces, or I'll know the reason why!" returned Jones with a snort through the big nose.

"Very well. I've no desire to embarrass you in your work," returned Barry in a quieter tone. "Bob, let's get out! We can't do anything here, that I can see, and if Mr. Jones has a clue of his own, we ought to let him follow it up."

Bob thought he caught a lightning flash from beneath Jones's heavy eyelids, as if this decision to let him alone would be of more importance than Barry Oliver suspected. But it was gone and did not come back, and Bob answered carelessly:

"I'm ready to go. Are you going uptown, Mr. Jones? There's room for you in our taxi, if you like."

"No, thanks!" he answered as he closed the window, and, giving a general look around the room, moved, with the others, to the door. "I'm going down to the wharves. I have friends there who might help me to trace this slippery customer of ours. Where is your cab?"

"At the foot of the street, near the place where that rascal held me up to-night!" answered Barry. "I wish he'd try it again—that's all."

William Jones smiled understandingly.

"No fear of his trying it twice—with you," he said. "I wonder he had the nerve to do it at all."

William Jones was always there with the "salve," as he called it, when it suited his purpose. Barry Oliver was not a lover of flattery, but he agreed with this sentiment. He rather wondered at Kid Griffin's nerve.

When Barry and Tower had departed in their taxicab for the Hotel Supremacy, Jones walked up and down the river front for fifteen minutes before cautiously returning to Donovan's, and even then he went in by way of the adjoining tenement and through the fence, as he had done before. He did not trust Bob Tower, and it was just possible that that not easily satisfied young man might be watching to see whether he did return to the room.

But Jones found the coast clear, and, after asking Donovan, in a casual way, as he ordered a glass of beer, whether anybody had been there to see the Kid, and being told that no one had come except the "two guys" who went out with him (Jones) half an hour before, he drank a little of his beer—it seemed to be flavored with garlic—and ran lightly up-stairs.

It did not take him long to bring the claw-hammer from its hiding-place under the table, where he had thrown it, and draw the nails that secured the closet door.

As he flung the door open, Kid Griffin, his face red and wet with perspiration, came lunging out, murderously angry!

"What the hell d'yer mean?" was the Kid's first explosive question as he leaned against the table and breathed hard. "Did yer want to suffercate me? Don't yer know they warn't no air in that place, an' that I come nigh croakin'? Who was those guys you was talkin' to a while ago, an' where you been since?"

"Simmer down, Kid!" returned Jones shortly. "If you hadn't been so smart and tried to beat me, this wouldn't have happened. It was the two men who own this stuff you swiped—the one you beaned with the sock of sand, and Captain Tower."

"Who's Captain Tower? I don't know the mark. Anyhow, that ain't no excuse for stoppin' my wind in that cupboard," was the sulky rejoinder. "Now, what are you goin' to do?"

Jones had lighted the gas-stove again and touched the irons, which were cold by this time, with the tips of his fingers.

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"I'll have to warm them up again," he grumbled. Then, turning fiercely on the whining Kid, he hissed: "Hurry up and make that door good. Get the bolt on. If you hadn't loafed on the job the first time this never would have happened."

The harried wharf-rat took his bolt and tools to the door, and labored to such good purpose that he had the door fastened with its new bolt by the time the irons were hot enough for use. He had not said a word during his task, contenting himself with a low, tuneless whistle, after the manner of most carpenters when they are busy. The Kid had learned that trade at the reformatory.

"Now, bo, I want to know when I git mine?" he burst out as he shuffled over to Jones, busy at the stove. "These here laces are as much mine as yours, an' I got a right to know how you're goin' to play the game."

"You won't make anything by trying to crowd me," replied Jones coolly as he laid the Catherine de Medici collar on the table, on a sheet of paper, with another one over it, and a carbon sheet on top of that. "If you'll be good, you'll make more money out of this job than you'd get as a 'dip' or by rolling drunks in two years!"

"If I thought you was tryin' to frame up somethin' on me," muttered the Kid with a sinister look at his companion, "I'd blow the gaff on yer in a holy second! If I was to tip off Macey Gibbons—"

"What's that?" sharply asked Jones. "Who did you say?"

The Kid did not answer, and William Jones went on with his task of taking carbon impressions of the Trevelyan laces.

But he was wondering whether he had really heard the name of a man who was his deadly enemy.

CHAPTER VII.

A POSSIBLE CLUE.

COLONEL COLEBERRY was in high feather as he welcomed his guests into his apartments in the Hotel Supremacy early in the evening following that in which Bob Tower and Barry Oliver had so nearly taken William Jones and Kid Griffin by surprise in that up-stairs room at Donovan's.

The colonel had made a speech at the Bankers' Convention which the evening papers printed nearly in full, and he had talked Bob Tower to a standstill on military matters in the hotel lobby just before coming to his own suite.

It is true that he had won his controversial victory over Bob more by dint of noise than sound judgment, but it pleased him, anyhow.

Now, in evening clothes, with newly-waxed mustache and imperial, and his white pompadour sticking up aggressively, he was monarch of all he surveyed, and gracious as became a potentate who knew himself worthy of his crown.

"Hello, Barry!" was his greeting, with nothing left of the acrimony of the night before when he found the laces were not ready for him. "How are you, son?" He shook hands vigorously. "And Lucy! Gad, my dear, where *do* you get them?"

"What, colonel?" was her smiling response. But she knew what he meant, even before he roared out:

"Why, those dimples! Say, if I was the captain there"—he gave his left hand to Bob Tower while still retaining Lucy Oliver's white-gloved, slim fingers in his right—"I'd fight the whole German army alone for the sake of that one in the middle of your right cheek, and I'd pull the Kaiser's nose to be allowed to put my lips to it! Oh, by Jove, here's Mrs. Coleberry! Come out here, mother! You know Barry and Lucy Oliver."

Mrs. Coleberry — white-haired like her husband, but, although smiling, inclined to be taciturn — shook hands with Barry, kissed Lucy, and glanced inquiringly, as well as admiringly, at Bob Tower, who, she thought, looked very handsome in his army uniform.

The colonel hastily introduced Bob, and then the other dinner-guest was announced —Mr. Samuel Lewis.

Samuel Lewis was an art dealer and importer, and a particular friend of the colonel's, although Barry never had met him before. He was a middle-aged man, with a

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square face, a mouth that turned down at the corners, and steady blue eyes. He was said to be one of the best judges of rare old laces in America, now that Barry Oliver's father had passed away.

The Coleberry private dining-room was just large enough and equipped with the perfection on which the Supremacy prided itself, and the dinner was promptly served by well-trained attendants. Colonel Coleberry had ordered that everything should be "right," and it was.

Lucy had to sit at the right hand of the host, and he made love to her all through the meal, though he was too thorough a man of the world to neglect his other guests. He carried most of the conversation, in spite of his sly attentions to the laughing girl, and with it all he contrived to eat a very good dinner.

"I'm seventy-seven," he proclaimed boastfully, "and I would be willing to bet a thousand dollars there is no better digestive machinery around this table. Know why? Hard-tack! That's what did it. For four years I had hardly anything else to eat when I was in the army, and I had the honor of telling General Grant myself, on one occasion—"

"Yes, the Trevelyan laces have a world-wide fame," Samuel Lewis was saying to Bob.

"What's that?" shouted the colonel, who had caught the word "Trevelyan." "You are right there, Lewis. And, did you know" —he paused to chuckle—"that I'm the man who owns those same laces?"

"You, colonel?" cried Lewis, surprised out of his usual placidity. "I—I did not know that."

"Well, you know it now," roared the colonel, laughing uproariously. "Barry got them for me. Brought them from the other side on purpose. One of the reasons I am in New York is to take them home with me personally. Do you know, I get pleasure out of merely touching the bag that contains a treasure like the Trevelyan laces."

Lucy glanced anxiously at her brother. But Barry was composedly eating his ice-cream, and only nodded with a smile at Colonel Coleberry when the old gentleman mentioned his name. For all that could be detected in Barry Oliver's demeanor, he might have had the Trevelyan laces securely locked up in the hotel safe, ready to turn them over to the colonel at any moment.

"These are the real Trevelyan laces, I suppose, colonel?" observed Lewis after a pause, during which Colonel Coleberry asked Lucy solicitously whether her ice-cream was all right, and playfully offered her a spoonful of his own. "They are the specimens that found their way over to New Mexico some two or three hundred years ago, and afterward, in a roundabout way, came into possession of the Trevelyan family in England?"

The colonel dropped his rather childish flirtation with Lucy, and became instantly the keen man of business that had made him a successful banker as he shouted across the table:

"Of course they are the real Trevelyan laces, Lewis. Do you suppose anybody would expect to ring in an imitation on *me?* I'd like to see the man who'd try it. No, sir. I am getting the real Simon-pure Trevelyan collection."

He looked at Barry Oliver, who nodded confirmation.

Samuel Lewis was not disturbed by the violent, bulldozing manner of the doughty colonel, and it was in a quiet, even voice that he remarked:

"You are 'getting' the laces? Does that mean, colonel, that you have not yet got them in your possession?"

"What the he—what has that to do with it?" bellowed Colonel Coleberry. "I know what they are. Barry says they are all right, and he knows. Even if he didn't, *I* do. Say, Barry, you told me this morning you have prints of the patterns," he broke off to say as he pointed a finger at him. "Couldn't you send somebody up to get them, just to prove to Lewis?"

"It isn't necessary," interposed Lewis. "I am sure, if you and Mr. Oliver say so, that they are genuine."

"Well, then," exploded the colonel, "what the blazes are you howling about? I have not yet had the laces placed in my hands. True! But Barry will deliver them to me to-morrow"—Barry winced—"and you can look them over, if you like. I

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wouldn't make that offer to everybody. But you're an expert, and I'd like you to see them, just for your own pleasure."

Mrs. Coleberry had taken no part in this discussion about the laces. In fact, she had had no opportunity, for her loud-voiced lord occupied the floor practically all the time. But she had looked interested. In fact the colonel had promised that the laces should be hers when he got them, and she could wear any of them she liked. She was not a connoisseur, like her husband, but she dearly loved beautiful lace.

The subject of the laces dropped, for Colonel Coleberry suddenly thought of a funny story he had heard at the convention in the morning, and, as he said, it was too good not to be passed along. So he told part of it, forgot the climax, began all over again, and finally put on the story a tag of his own—painfully weak—to bring it to an end somehow.

"Suppose we go down to the lobby with our cigars," he proposed through the perfunctory laughter that followed his recital. "It is lively down there, and Mrs. Coleberry likes to see what New York women are wearing in the evening. Lucy enjoys giving Eastern duds the once-over, too, no doubt. Though," he added quickly, with the old-fashioned gallantry that went with the waxed mustache and imperial, "California women can give New York cards and spades when it comes to style!"

He patted his wife's shoulder, to remind her that the compliment was for her, as well as Lucy, and in a few minutes the whole party was in one of the gilded elevators going to the lower floor.

Lucy went into one of the crimson-shadowed reception-rooms — with dainty ivory-finished desks, well supplied with Supremacy monogrammed stationery, scattered about, and which were mainly reserved for the use of ladies—and dropped upon a sofa, to chat and to watch the generally gorgeously-attired people lounging about, while Bob Tower, the colonel, Oliver Barry, and Samuel Lewis stood in the spacious lobby smoking.

Colonel Coleberry had turned away to talk to a fellow-banker, and the two were deep in a dignified financial discussion, with the colonel's voice far overtopping that of the other, when Samuel Lewis beckoned Barry Oliver and Bob Tower aside, with rather more concern than usually showed in his face.

"Have you the Trevelyan laces safe?" was Samuel Lewis's abrupt question as the three walked out of ear-shot of the colonel.

The query was addressed to Barry Oliver, and the steady blue eyes were fixed penetratingly on Barry's face. Barry returned the look, as if he wondered the reason for the interrogation. Then he replied slowly:

"No. They have been stolen!"

There was a pause, and Barry and Bob both regarded curiously the unreadable, square face of Samuel Lewis, waiting for him to say more. He spoke at last, and though his tone was low, there was a slight tremor, as if he were trying to keep his voice even with some difficulty:

"I thought so when the colonel said tonight that he had bought them, but that they had not yet been delivered."

"But, Mr. Lewis," broke in Barry excitedly, "what about the laces? Do you know anything about them? As an art dealer and importer, and an expert—"

"Exactly. You are right," interrupted Lewis, still quietly. "They *have* been offered to me. Moreover, I have agreed to take them, and I have a customer. I expect to have the Trevelyan laces tomorrow."

"What do you mean to do?" asked Barry, after a short silence.

"What *can* I do?" was the rejoinder. "Naturally I do not intend to buy stolen property. I am much disappointed, I confess. It was a pleasant surprise to me when I heard the Trevelyan collection was in New York, and I let my customer know at once. She had commissioned me to get them for her, and I had been in negotiation with the owner in England, but had failed. They told me by cable that the laces had already been disposed of, but did not say where."

"Who offered the laces to you?" threw in Bob.

"I have never seen the person, and I do not know his name, or who he is. But he sent me carbon impressions of the laces to-

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day—of some of them, that is—and I recognized them immediately. I have seen the originals in England. I am to put an advertisement—a personal—in a New York paper to-morrow morning—just the words 'Tryan—Yes,' if I am willing to purchase, or 'Tryan—No,' if my answer is in the negative."

"I see," commented Bob. "He uses the beginning and the end of the word 'Trevelyan.' He's too cunning to take the whole word. 'Trevelyan' would be altogether too obvious. Do you mind putting the advertisement in—'Tryan—Yes,' accepting the offer?"

"That's what I was going to suggest," answered Lewis thoughtfully, as he flicked off the ash of his cigar. "But what will come after that, of course, I don't know. Probably it will lead to my seeing the man, and then—"

Bob Tower interrupted, smilingly.

"If you will keep in touch with Mr. Oliver—or me," he said. "I think we can attend to the rest of it."

"Bully idea!" was Barry's explosive assent. "And if I don't knock his block off before giving him to the police, may I turn my ranch into a measly sheep-farm! The infernal thieving coyote!"

"Then I'll see about inserting the advertisement," promised Lewis, with a ghost of a smile. "I'll call you up when I hear anything. You're living at the Supremacy, I believe, Mr. Oliver?"

"Yes, and I'll be here all day till I hear from you. Unless I come to your place," he added tentatively. "I know where you are, in Fifth Avenue."

"Better not come until I communicate with you," objected Lewis. "This fellow, whoever he is, may have somebody watching. He is no ordinary crook, I should say, from his methods—and also from the fact that he has been able to get away with such valuable loot as these laces. By the way, have you any suspicions as to who the rascal is?"

Barry glanced involuntarily at Bob Tower, but before the latter could answer, Lewis went on hurriedly: "Never mind. That's your own affair. Here comes the colonel, and he's bringing somebody with him."

As Samuel Lewis and Barry Oliver walked toward Colonel Coleberry in response to his boisterous, "Come here, boys! I want you to meet Judge Lipscombe!" Bob Tower hung back, to look into the reception-room, where Lucy was sitting with Mrs. Coleberry.

Bob had just reached the portièred doorway when he saw a rather large messenger-boy in uniform slouch up to Lucy and hand her a note.

The girl, after scanning the paper hurriedly, went over to a desk, wrote a few lines on a sheet of the hotel paper, sealed it in an envelope, and gave it to the overgrown messenger, who slipped out of sight much more expeditiously than his kind usually move.

Bob was debating whether to go over to her or not, when she settled the question for him with a scarcely perceptible movement of her head, beckoning him to her side.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SINISTER TRYST.

BY the time Bob had walked across the heavily carpeted floor—and it did not take him long—Lucy had excused herself to Mrs. Coleberry and was sitting at one of the ornate desks further away than the one where she had written her note, with the light of the shaded lamp bringing out the glory of her flame-gold hair and playing hide-and-seek with her dimples.

For a moment he stood behind her, his heart beating furiously as he noted the delicate curve of her white neck, where red-gold tendrils, like vagrant chrysanthemum-petals, played amorously, and he clenched his fingers to hold them back from the sacrilege of touch.

It was but a passing impulse—the old Adam that has tormented lovers since the first garden—and then he took the hand she offered and was grateful.

Her smile was inviting—for it was that of a woman in difficulties—and he bent down until his face was so close to hers that he felt the gentle warmth of it, while the subtle perfume of her welled up and intoxicated him.

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"What can I do?" he asked, steadying his tones with a mighty effort. "Anything the matter?"

"Not exactly," she answered, and her smile gave way to a look of anxiety. "But I'm perplexed. Will you read this?"

She handed him a yellow telegraph-blank, on which was scrawled, in a very bad, unformed hand—the writing of an illiterate person, or of one who seldom used a pencil—this laconic communication:

> bring 50 dollers to brige 155 st ovar polo growns at 10 to nite an i wil giv yu 1 big lase come aloan walk on brige i will see yu dont tri to put annythin ovar on me i wil kil yu tel boy yu wil do it i can sel all other lases to yu if yu sa so.

There was no signature and it was not addressed to any one. The messenger appeared to have been instructed to give the paper to Lucy Oliver, and evidently he knew her by sight.

Bob Tower read this precious note over twice, frowning. The girl looked up in his face, trying to read his thoughts, and he saw that the trembling of her ripe lips made the dimple at the corner come and go pitifully.

"Damn!" was his first word. "Oh, I beg your pardon!" he added, distressed. "But actually this scoundrel—"

"I know how you feel," she laughed softly. "I should like to have said it myself. Thank you!"

He looked earnestly into her dancing eyes, but he did not laugh.

"Of course you can't go," he said, when he had read the message over again—for the absence of punctuation, as well as the spelling, made it difficult to comprehend. "It's a transparent trick, and it ought to be possible to run the blackguard down without your appearing in it. I can guess who sent this thing."

"So can I," she said quietly.

"No doubt it was Kid Griffin, the blackguard who stole the laces from Barry's taxicab. I've heard since that's his name. Well, I'll go after him."

"But—*I'm* going," was Lucy Oliver's unexpected announcement—and Bob knew her well enough by this time to know she would have her way. "I said so in the answer I gave the messenger. But," she added, in a whisper, as she put her hand on the desk where he could cover it with his own. "You may go with me if you like."

"I intend to go, whether you do or not," he answered gravely.

She saw the love light in his eyes, and from that moment she *knew*.

There was a pause, which had no explainable reason, but which was as inevitable at that moment as if both had been suddenly stricken dumb. Then Bob asked thoughtfully:

"You didn't think to notice the boy's number, did you? You're sure he was either Western Union or Postal?"

"I didn't notice. He was in the regular uniform of a messenger. Why?"

"I saw him, and he looked different from most of them somehow," mused Bob. "Of course I could find out by making inquiries at the branch offices of the companies. But that would take time, and I don't think it matters." He looked at his watch. "It's past nine. Will you wait here while I speak to Barry?"

He moved to leave her, and she stopped him with a hand on his arm.

"What is it?" he asked, and it was remarkable how the determination he had formed to tell her his secret within twenty-four hours put a new note into his voice. "I won't be away a minute."

"You are not going to tell Barry, are you?" she pleaded. "He's so headstrong. He'd want to go to that bridge himself, and I'm afraid he'd only scare the man off, and we never should get the laces."

"I won't tell him anything except to ask him to trust you with me for an hour or two," replied Bob, adding still more softly: "*You* will trust me, won't you?"

The brightening of her eyes and the quick flush that brought the dimples with it were assurance enough. But she whispered—and her confiding tones set all his pulses throbbing tumultuously: "You are the only person I *can* trust—now."

"And God helping me," he returned, brokenly—for his voice was beyond his control just then—"I'll be worthy of every trust you place in me—Lucy."

He would not trust himself to look in

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her face when he had thus spoken her name, but lightly touching the back of her hand with the tips of his fingers, he hurried away to find Barry.

Fortunately Barry was alone, for Colonel Coleberry was talking to some one else, while Samuel Lewis was smoking on a sofa by himself.

"Hello, Bob!" was Barry's loud greeting. "Where have you been? Thunder! I'm sick of New York! Wish I were going back home to-morrow. If it were not for those confounded laces, I'd strike out hell-split for Arizona on the morning train."

"Listen, Barry!" interrupted Bob, and his manner and tone told Barry that something had turned up. "I want to take Miss Oliver for a taxi ride. You don't object, do you? It's a beautiful night, and—"

"Hold on there, Bob!" broke in Barry, fixing his green eyes on the other. "You don't expect me to believe that Lucy wants to go riding alone with you just for pleasure? I know Lucy. She's free enough out home. But she's been at that school in San Francisco, and she knows what's what in cities. She'd have asked Mrs. Coleberry to go along as a chaperon if it was just a joy-ride you had in mind." Then, as the thought came to him: "Perhaps Mrs. Coleberry *is* going?"

"No. I want to take Miss Oliver alone," replied Bob coolly. "But you are right, Barry. It is not only as a pleasure ride that I want to take her." He whispered cautiously. "It is in connection with the Trevelyan laces."

"What?" roared Barry, so loudly that Colonel Coleberry and several other persons turned involuntarily. "What have you found out?" he added in a low tone. Then positively: "I'll go, too."

"That's just what you must not do," returned Bob Tower firmly. "Lend me a soft hat and your light overcoat. I don't want to wear my military-coat or cap. I'll be breaking the regulations in not wearing my full uniform, but I have to do it. Have you the things down here?"

"No, they are in my room. Come along."

Barry Oliver was a man of quick decision, and he walked toward the elevator as he told Bob to come. The latter nodded significantly to Lucy as he passed the door of the reception-room. She glided out and whispered:

"Bring me that dark cloak I wore when I went with you to follow Barry last night. He'll know where it is. He'll let you go?" she added anxiously.

"Yes," was Bob's hurried reply as he hastened to the elevator after Barry.

Half an hour later, Bob Tower, with a long coat of Barry's covering his uniform, and a soft hat replacing the telltale military officer's cap, was talking earnestly to Lucy in a taxicab as it left Central Park at One Hundred and Tenth Street, and made its way, slowly—by Bob's orders—toward Eighth Avenue.

He was thinking that the dimness of the cab detracted nothing from the girl's beauty.

Lights from the stores and street-lamps shone on her clear, pink-and-white face, and sent thrusts of extra brilliance into her eyes—eyes that were turned upon him most of the time.

With the lace shawl thrown back from her forehead, making a tangle of golden-red where the threads had caught her hair, the black cloak falling open, to reveal the carnation-pink corsage, with its elusive wide opening amid the mist of laces, and the soft silk skirt that ended in white slippers and ravishing pink hose, what wonder that Bob Tower found it difficult to marshal his plans for the capture of a dirty wharf-rat!

He came to himself with a jerk, as he said, with rather strained briskness: "I'll leave you at a Hundred and Forty-Fifth Street. I don't like to do it, but it is the only way." He paused, but she only showed him a maddening, thin, white line between her lips as she smiled acquiescence. She was entirely in his hands, and evidently was content. He continued: "The taxi will take you to Amsterdam Avenue, and so to One Hundred and Fifty-Fifth."

His voice trailed away. Deuce take it! How *could* he keep his mind on such sordid matters as running down a sneak-thief, with those glorious eyes flashing on him, and that opening in her low-cut evening-frock showing the white bosom heaving softly with the unsullied emotions of a perfect womanhood?

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But he clenched his teeth and got a grip on himself, just as she, smilingly, asked what she was to do next.

He begged her pardon hastily, and took up his instructions steadily where he had broken off.

"When you get to the end of the bridge nearest Amsterdam Avenue," he said, "leave the cab and walk forward. No doubt the fellow will be watching from some dark corner, to see whether you are alone. Tell the cabman to wait. I've already arranged with him to do as he is told, and he is to have double fare, with something extra, if he makes no mistakes."

"But where will you be?" she asked, the sensitive lips parting in sudden apprehension. "I'll hardly know how to proceed any further by myself, you know."

"By yourself!" he repeated in tender reproach. "Can you think for a moment that I won't be within reach? That would be a gallant, knightly thing to do, wouldn't it?" he added with a light laugh at the absurdity of such a possibility. "I shall be there."

"But you are to leave me at One Hundred and Forty-Fifth and Eighth Avenue. I wish you could go all the way with me."

Right there was danger of Bob Tower's elaborate scheme all going agley. She wished he could remain with her in the cab! That was what she meant, and what she had said, in plain words.

And ever since the cab had left the Hotel Supremacy he had been wondering within himself, as he glanced from time to time at her eager face in the enveloping black lace, whether it would be too soon to tell her what was in his mind.

Bob Tower was an impetuous lover, but he could not forget that he had met this girl only the day before. Yet that he had fallen head over heels in love with her was a fact that would not be denied.

What was he to do? He tried to adjust matters by reflecting that he had known her years before, when she was little more than a child. Somehow, that did not seem to help, and he gave it up for the time being.

"I wish it were possible for me to remain in the cab with you," he murmured. "You must know that." His voice trembled. "But it would spoil my plan for trapping the thief."

"I see," she whispered obediently. "Well, please tell me what I am to do."

"You can depend on my being near when you need me. When you walk on the bridge, the thief, after making sure you are alone in the taxi, will follow you—probably some distance away. Don't let him catch you until you are near the top of the stairs that run down to the Elevated railway. It will be on your left as you walk along—the north side of the bridge."

"I don't know the locality at all, remember," she interrupted gently. "I never was in New York before."

"You can't mistake it," he assured her. "If I were not certain of that, I wouldn't let you do this—for a million dollars' worth of laces!"

She smiled mischievously into her face.

"You must think I'm very valuable. A million dollars! Is any girl worth that?"

It was a direct challenge, and, as has been remarked, Bob Tower was impetuous, especially in obeying the promptings of his heart. One of her small hands was smothered in his, as he bent so low that the crinkly red-gold hair brushed his eager face.

"Lucy!" he whispered. "If a girl was not worth more millions than could be told to the man who tells her he loves her, then she should not believe him."

There was silence for perhaps half a dozen heart-beats. Then she answered softly: "I think she should know something about the man before going so far as that."

She did not try to withdraw her hand, and he felt that the gentle billowing which had kept the misty lace over her bosom rising and falling rhythmically had quickened to a stormy throbbing. But she hid her face by turning it away.

"Lucy!" he said, in rapid, earnest tones. "You knew me six years ago, when I used to help you with your lessons, on the ranch in Arizona, and I used to call you my little sweetheart, and try to kiss you."

"I remember." Her voice was barely audible. Then, with a nervous laugh: "But I never let you do it. And—won't you please talk about something else—just now? I'm—I'm—"

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She did not finish. But he knew that she was thinking hard, and that it would be better to wait a little before asking her to say a word that few girls are willing to utter too readily. He removed his hand from hers.

"You are not angry?" he asked eagerly.

"No," she returned, very softly. "I am not angry. Please tell me what else I am to do on the bridge."

"When the man catches up to you," he replied in a quieter tone, "keep on walking and ask him to show you the lace he has for sale. He'll probably bring it out then. *Make* sure it *is* part of the Trevelyan collection. That will give you an excuse for prolonging the interview, during which you will be getting nearer to the head of the Elevated stairway. Do you think you can remember the patterns as you saw them in the carbon prints?"

"I am sure I can," was her confident answer. "That is, I'm certain I shall recognize them if I see them again."

"Good!" he exclaimed with an admiring chuckle. "Though I'm sure I don't know how you can do it. Laces all look pretty much alike to me."

"But, after I've seen and identified the lace, what then?" she asked. "Am I to buy it?"

"Yes, you must do that, or he might become suspicious. Oh, by the way—the money!" He took out his pocketbook from inside his military tunic. "Give him the full fifty dollars—but not before he has handed you the lace, of course."

She nodded her understanding. Then, as Bob thrust a roll of bills into her hand, a sudden thought came to her, and she said reprovingly: "This is your own money, I'm sure. Why didn't you get it from Barry?"

"I couldn't ask him," he returned shortly. "That would have told him what we were going to do, and he would have shouted, 'Blackmail!' and made a lot of fuss. But don't trouble about that. We'll get this money back from the thief. If we don't, I'll tell Barry."

"Mind you do," she counseled, and the touch of authority in her voice was of that peculiar quality you only hear from wives to their husbands—or from a girl to the man whose engagement-ring she wears, or knows she will wear. "The cab has stopped," she added with a swift change of tone. "Is this the corner?"

"Yes," was his answer as he leaned over her to give his parting instructions, his lips so close to her shell-like ear that they touched it—accidentally, of course. "You understand what you are to do?" he added anxiously. "Leave the cab slowly. But, once on the bridge, walk as swiftly as you can, without actually running."

"I understand."

She gave him her hand, and, as he took it, he looked into her telltale eyes at such near range that the fragrance from her gently parted lips remained with him after he had whispered "*Au revoir!*" and left her.

He was still conscious of the subtle perfume of her when she waved a farewell from the cab-window, and afterward, as he stood waiting for a trolley-car to take him to the rendezvous.

CHAPTER IX.

UP AGAINST IT.

AND the girl? In the solitude of the cab she laughed aloud—a little tinkling laugh that was glorified by a world of tenderness. The laugh was followed by a sigh, but the veriest tyro in the study of sighs would have known it came from a glad heart.

Her cab made good time, and it seemed that, after getting into Amsterdam Avenue, it was only a few minutes until it swung around the corner eastward at One Hundred and Fifty-Fifth. Then it stopped, and the driver croaked through the front window:

"Shall I go to the bottom of the hill?"

"Is there a hill?" she returned. "I didn't know. I want you to stop at this end of the bridge. Then I'll get out. Go slowly now, please."

"Right-o!" was the response.

The cab crawled slowly down the little grade, and, crossing St. Nicholas Avenue, came to a halt near the garage at the bridge end.

Lucy drew her lace shawl closely over her head, and with her cloak hiding the shim-

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mery dress beneath, she peered into the gloom looking for the man she was to meet.

She saw nobody. So far as she could discern, in the uncertain moonlight, the bridge was entirely deserted. If the man who was to offer the lace for sale were anywhere about, he was in hiding.

Very slowly she got out of the taxicab and went forward to speak to the driver.

"You will wait," she said, authoritatively. "You have been instructed to stay till I come back, I believe?"

"That's all right," answered the man in a husky whisper. "I'm wise. You'll find me here when you want me."

He leaned back in his seat, and, lighting a cigarette, puffed away with the serene enjoyment of one with whom things were going well. The starter at the hotel had told him who Bob was, and then had wished him "good luck!" in a way which conveyed the conviction that the good luck was already his. Members of the wealthy Tower family could afford to pay well for service—and they had the reputation of invariably doing so.

Lucy crossed over, and once on the bridge, quickened her steps without looking to right or left. She was wondering where and when Bob would appear.

"I shouldn't be surprised to find that he is watching me even now," she thought, and the conviction that he was protecting her, even though unseen, shed a warmth over her that made her strange adventure pleasant rather than otherwise.

Not many yards had she gone on the bridge when her quick ear detected the shuffling of badly shod feet behind her. The flippety-flop cadence suggested loose, worn-out soles, and heels that were not what they should be. She had heard such footsteps in San Francisco, and they were connected in her mind with seedy, wobegone individuals who begged for "two bits" to get a bed or a meal.

She walked faster. As she did so, the person behind also hurried, and she feared she would have difficulty in reaching the little house on the bridge—which she supposed was the entry to the Elevated stairway Bob had told her about—before her pursuer caught up with her.

"Hey, there!" panted a high, rather breathless voice behind. "What t' hell d' yer t'ink yer doin'? Runnin' a foot-race?"

Lucy did not slacken her pace or look around. She knew now that the thief who wanted to sell her the stolen piece of lace was close at her heels, but she would lead him on as far as she could. Bob Tower had not given her that injunction for nothing.

Hey! You! Let up, will yer? Stop when I tell yer! I'm the guy you want ter see! Wait a minute!"

There was menace in the shrill tone. She would have to stop soon, or give up the chance of recovering the lace altogether.

She saw that the stairway was not more than a hundred yards away, and she turned to look at the person who had hailed her.

One glance, even in the fading moonlight, told her that he was the messenger boy who had brought the note, and to whom she had entrusted a written answer.

He grinned as he saw her start, and as he came up to her side, remarked with a chuckle:

"Gits yer goat ter find you had me in that hotel, where you could have pinched me wit'out any bother, don't it? But I used to be a messenger once—for a mont', an' I knowed the game all right, all right. I knowed I could put it over, an' I did. Now, got th' jack wit yer?"

"What?" asked Lucy as she quickened her step, taking the wharf-rat with her—for it was Kid Griffin, of course. "I don't understand."

"Aw! What t' hell yer givin' me?" he growled disgustedly. "Can't yer understand United States? The cush, the coin, the money!"

He held out a dirty hand, and she noticed how frayed was the cuff of his uniform coat, suggesting that it was one that had been thrown aside as too ragged for service, and had been picked up by the Kid cheap for his present scheme.

"Come across now!" he urged angrily.

By this time Lucy had calmed down, and was prepared to carry out her part of the proceedings as Bob Tower had instructed her. So she turned on the Kid with a sharpness that surprised him, as she said sternly:

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"Where is the lace?"

"Oh, I'll give it to yer," he answered. "You don't need to worry about that. I got it here in me kick. Where's de fifty?"

"When I've seen the lace and know it is part of the lot you stole—"

The Kid held up a warning hand and uttered several oaths below his breath as he looked around apprehensively. Then he growled:

"Hush up! Ain't yer got no more sense than to say a t'ing like that when yer don't know who might be lis'enin'? If you wasn't a lady, I'd hand yer a swipe in the jaw! S'help me! I will, anyhow, if yer make anot'er crack like that!"

"Show me the lace," was Lucy's only response to this tirade. "You shall have the money afterward, if we come to terms."

"We'll come ter terms all right," snarled the Kid. "Or I'll chuck yer over the bridge. You ain't in no hotel now, wit' guys standin' around ter help yer." But even as he spoke he knew she did not fear him. "Here's yer lace."

From his trouser-pocket he dragged a crumpled mass and spread it out in the light of the lamp at the head of the stairway. It made Lucy shiver to recognize, in this soiled, wrinkled pile, the priceless Catherine de Medici collar that her brother had promised should be her very own.

Fifty dollars! It was worth more than a hundred times that paltry sum!

She clasped the precious collar to her bosom with one hand, and dragged from an inside pocket of her cloak the fifty dollars.

Kid Griffin stretched out his hand greedily—and found his wrist trapped by four powerful fingers, and a thumb like spring steel, while a man's voice said distinctly in his ear:

"Give up the rest of those laces or I'll hand you over to Kelly!"

The Kid seemed to shrink in his ill-fitting uniform. He did not speak.

"Oh, Bob!" burst involuntarily from Lucy. "How splendid of you to be here!"

The Kid looked up hastily in surprise as Bob Tower uttered a cheerful, joyous laugh—a laugh that the wharf-rat felt instinctively had no connection with his own arrest. But he was quick to take cunning advantage of his captor's display of evident pleasant humor.

"Leggo my arm an' I'll tell yer jest how it was, cap!" he whined. "An' I'll lead yer ter them ot'er laces, too. I've had it put all over me, an' I'm goin' t' squeal, if they croaks me fer it. An' that's 'cross me heart an' wishermaydie!" he added, with the solemnity of one making an affidavit.

"Shut up, you—you rat!" ordered Bob, his gaze fastened on Lucy's flushed face and dancing eyes. "This fellow has not hurt you in any way, has he?" he asked, eagerly, as he gave Kid Griffin a casual shake. "If he has—"

Lucy Oliver smiled scornfully at the question.

"I never said a word to th' lady that was out o' th' way!" broke in the Kid, in his shaky treble. "The lady herse'f will tell yer that. Won't yer, lady?"

"Officer Kelly wants you, very badly," remarked Bob in a reflective tone as he looked at the squirming Kid. "I guess I'd better turn you over to him." Then, suddenly changing his tone, he thundered: "Where are those other laces?"

"I ain't got 'em," shrieked the Kid. "But—but—I can tell yer how to get 'em."

"Where are they?"

"I don't know where they are to-night. But I know where they will be, p'raps tomorrer, but maybe not till the day after. An' that's as true as I live, 'cross my—"

"Never mind about that," interrupted Bob. "I dare say you'd lie as easily across your heart as any other way. You say you don't know where the laces are now?"

"That's the Gord's truth, cap!" came hysterically from the wretched Kid. "If I knowed where they was, I'd take you to 'em right away. I'd love to do it. That big cop, Kelly, couldn't make me say no more than *that*."

Bob gave him another shake, and this time it was hard, and not at all casual.

"If you don't know where the rest of these laces are, how did you come into possession of this one you were trying to sell to Miss Oliver?" he demanded. "You are lying, and you know it."

"S'help me, I ain't no sech a t'ing!" protested the Kid, in an injured tone. "An' if

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you'll take yer fingers off'n my arm, so I can git me breat', I'll tell yer all about it."

"Go ahead, then!" ordered Bob, loosening his clutch on the fellow's wrist, but not taking his hand away. "Speak quick, too."

"Well, the trut' is, I swiped this here lace from the mug as has the rest of the stuff. He was givin' me the finger, an' I beat him to it."

"Who *is* the man—this mug, as you call him?" asked Bob, tightening his hold again.

But Kid Griffin only shook his head obstinately and repeated his snuffling entreaty that Bob would release his wrist. It was evident that, for some reason—probably fear of somebody unknown—he did not want to tell who had the laces.

Just then a policeman could be made out in the distance, coming along from the Eighth Avenue end of the bridge, and Bob resolved to get to the taxicab that had brought Lucy, taking the reluctant Kid with them.

"We shall have to hold this fellow until we can get from him where the laces are and who has them," explained Bob. "He isn't the kind of traveling-companion I would choose for you, as I need not say. But I'll keep him on the other side of me in the cab."

"I don't mind, if we can recover the laces," was her quiet answer. "Will you take him to a police-station?"

"Probably—later," replied Bob grimly.

"He confesses that he's a thief," she went on. "Besides, we've found some of the property on him. Still, I think the most important thing is to find the remainder. Don't you?"

"S'help me—" began the Kid.

"Keep quiet!" ordered Bob, giving him an angry shake. Then, to Lucy: "I'm going to find the other laces, and I'll make this scoundrel help me. That or State prison for him."

"I'm sure up against it," moaned Kid Griffin.

Bob threw the wharf-rat into a corner of the cab, as far away from Lucy as possible. Then, as they rolled along on their way to the Hotel Supremacy, he cross-examined his prisoner with merciless perseverance. But it was no use. In vain he employed both threats and promises in his endeavor to learn from the Kid the name of the man who had the remainder of the Trevelyan laces.

When, at the end of an exhausting twenty minutes, the taxi drew up at the hotel entrance without his having been able to get an answer, Bob Tower began to understand how it is that even the terrible "third degree" of the police often fails to extract important information from creatures of the Kid Griffin type.

While Lucy jumped from the cab and ran to Barry to show him how she had got possession of the Catherine de Medici collar, Bob made certain arrangements with one of the huskiest of the gigantic baggage-men about the hotel to take charge of the Kid.

"Keep him safe, Mike!" directed Bob. "Wait a moment! I'll go to the desk and make arrangements."

Five minutes later he handed a key to the giant porter, Mike, and the Kid was spirited away by a baggage elevator to one of the upper floors of the Supremacy, to remain there till he was wanted.

Bob looked wistfully across the wide lobby, where Lucy was excitedly talking to Barry.

For a moment Bob was tempted to join them. Then he remembered a slip of the tongue on the part of the Kid, which gave him a hopeful hint.

So he got into the taxi again and told the driver to take him to a certain street near the western water-front—a street on which one Donovan had a saloon, and which was on the regular beat of a big policeman named Kelly.

CHAPTER X.

SETTING THE SNARE.

CAPTAIN BOB TOWER had enjoyed a good night's sleep in the room that, for various reasons, he had taken at the Hotel Supremacy, and was driving away all morning drowsiness under the cold shower, when there came a knock at the door.

"Well, I'll be blowed!" muttered Bob. "This is a nice time to disturb a man."

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Then, raising his voice to a martial bellow, he told the person outside to "wait just a minute!"

With a bath-robe around him, he opened the door and found one of the hotel attendants with a message.

"What is it?" roared Bob angrily. "Why couldn't you telephone up, or put the blasted message on the ice until I had time to dress? What damned fool is it wants me at this ungodly hour—eight o'clock, when everybody knows I didn't come up to this room until past two? What kind of management is there in this hotel? Seems to me—"

"It's from Miss Oliver and Mr. Oliver, sir," interrupted the man, and he was wise enough to put the lady's name first. "They—"

"Thunder and Mars! Why didn't you say so before?" broke in Bob, with a violence worthy of Colonel Coleberry himself. "What *is* the message? Give it to me—quick!"

"They request the pleasure of your company at breakfast in their rooms at nine o'clock, sir," continued the man, who was an old hand and therefore unruffled by the before-breakfast asperity of a guest. "Shall I tell them—"

"Tell them I'll be there with very great pleasure, of course," thundered Bob. "Good God! What—" The man was turning away. "Here! Come back! What are you running away for? Wait till I get to my pocket!"

The attendant indulged in a respectful grin, which widened as he saw the size of the tip he had received, and Bob Tower banged the door shut, practically in his face.

Nine o'clock! And it was seven fifty at that moment! Bob would not have much more than time enough to dress.

As a soldier, he had no choice of raiment, for he would *have* to wear his army uniform. But he *could* take care that it was thoroughly brushed, and that all its buttons, *et cetera,* were shining and in perfect order.

Particular as Bob was that morning, however, he was ready at half past eight. So he had thirty minutes in which to think over the incidents of the night before, and to speculate on their connection with the breakfast conference to which he had been invited.

He had visited Donovan's and made a number of inquiries there that might or might not bring results. Also he had seen Officer Kelly and arranged with him to be at a stated Fifth Avenue address in the afternoon—if Bob telephoned him.

As for Kid Griffin, that amphibious rodent was at that moment safely locked in a small bedroom on the twelfth floor of the Supremacy, where strong iron bars made escape by the window impossible—even if he could have climbed down—while the hall attendant on the floor had particular injunctions to see that he did not get out by the door.

"That reminds me," muttered Bob, as he took up the telephone and called the hotel office, to make sure his prisoner was secure, and to order a good, substantial breakfast for him.

These things done, he lighted a cigarette and gave himself up to day dreams—through which floated a fairylike figure, in a shimmering carnation-pink gown, and crowned with a tangle of red-gold, crinkled hair, which caressed the most captivating white neck he ever had beheld.

It was five minutes to nine when Bob was announced at the door of the Oliver suite. Barry and Lucy were waiting for him.

Was there something a trifle constrained in Lucy's manner as she gave him her firm little hand after Barry had shaken hands with him about as gently as if roping a steer? Did she seem to fear to meet his eye at first, and yet, directly afterward, look at him with her usual clear, straight gaze, as she wished him good morning? Did the dimples come and go a little quicker than usual when Bob bent low over her hand, and, unseen by Barry, brushed his lips across the slender fingers?

Bob could not have answered these questions. If he could, he would not have been tormenting himself about them all through breakfast, even though his chair was next to Lucy's, and they had many opportunities to exchange a whispered word while the big Arizona ranchman was absorbed in his meal.

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Breakfast was served before anything was said about the missing laces and plans for their recovery. Then, as Barry despatched his first egg and attacked another, he opened the ball in his usual tempestuous manner.

"Bob, I believe we've got a mine under the damned horse-thief who stole those laces."

"Kid Griffin?" asked Bob.

"Naw!" drawled Barry, in disgust. "That poor, whimpering sneak! He doesn't amount to anything. Still, I'm glad you got the Medici collar out of him. That was a mighty good stroke."

"Of course it was, Barry!" put in Lucy, hastening to prevent any disparagement of what Bob had done in the matter. "And if it hadn't been for Mr. Tower, we shouldn't have the collar now."

Barry gave utterance to a volcanic guffaw.

"You two amuse me! You're as proud over catching that Kid What's-His-Name as a chicken over her first egg. Eh, Bob?"

He winked at Bob to make him understand it was all a joke, and that he appreciated the capture of the Kid. Then he went on:

"Yes, sir! We have a mine under him as sure as shooting, and we'll spring it this afternoon. Lucy knows."

Bob had looked inquiringly at Barry, but his gaze quickly wandered to the glowing face of the girl, as she nodded assent, and explained:

"Barry had a telephone from Mr. Samuel Lewis early this morning, saying that he had heard from his advertisement already."

"The yellow coyote could hardly wait to get in touch with Lewis," snorted Barry. "It was before seven when he called up, and he knew where Lewis lived, for he telephoned his home."

"He could find the residence in the telephone-book," quietly remarked Bob. "But his being in such a hurry indicates that he is afraid of some interference, and that he wants to get the laces off his hands as quickly as possible."

Barry brought his large hand down on the table with a bang that made the silver ring.

"By Jason!" he shouted. "You're right, Bob! That's it! There's somebody after him, and I'll bet that scarecrow you have shut up on the twelfth floor could tell who it is."

"Most probably," was Bob's cool response. "I'm going up to see him after breakfast. What did Lewis tell you?"

"That the man who telephoned him will be at Lewis's place on Fifth Avenue at two o'clock, prepared to talk business."

"Didn't say he'd bring the laces?" asked Bob thoughtfully.

"No. But if he comes himself, it won't be hard to get them, I guess."

Bob said nothing for a few moments. At last, drawing a long breath: "No, I don't think it will be hard. Is that all Lewis told you?"

"That was all. Then I sent word to you to come to breakfast. I didn't want to say even that much over the phone."

"Have you any plans?"

Bob said this while looking at Lucy. With the long, dark lashes falling over her eyes, as she went on with her breakfast, and a stray lock of the red-gold hair dancing on her forehead, he reminded her of a wood nymph as he had seen them in pictures, and he almost marveled that she needed such prosaic food as eggs and rolls and coffee.

Not that she was too ethereal to enjoy her breakfast. Lucy Oliver was a Western girl, used to riding hard and to outdoor exercise of all kinds, and her appetite was healthy, especially in the morning.

So, when she suddenly looked up, just as she reached for another roll, she broke into a laugh in which all the dimples joined, and Bob was glad she was a real girl, and not a dryad.

Barry had not noticed any of this by-play. He was considering Bob's last question, while he kept on with his breakfast.

He had not made any definite plans, except to get the laces from the thief when he should offer them for sale to Samuel Lewis.

Now that he was asked pointblank what he meant to do, however, he came to a quick decision.

"I'm going to be in Samuel Lewis's place when that fellow comes," he announced

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loudly, "and he'll be lucky if I don't ride him down as soon as I get hold of my property. I want you to go with me, Bob."

"Can I go?" asked Lucy, hesitatingly.

"Why?" bellowed her brother. "What do *you* want to go for? You have your Catherine de Medici collar, and the rest of the laces are nothing to you."

Then, as he saw the hurt expression in her eyes, while her breath came quick and short, he added hastily: "No, I didn't mean that, of course, sis. But there may be a row, and I didn't want you to be in it. Eh, Bob?"

"Mr. Tower won't object, I'm sure," she declared before Bob could speak. "He knows I can take care of myself with thieves."

"You gave good proof of that last night," answered Bob.

"Very well, then," agreed Barry, good naturedly. "Let her come. I wonder who the thief is? Some professional crook, I should say, from his ways. By the way, have you heard anything of Jones?"

"No. Haven't *you?*" asked Bob.

"He hasn't been around," replied Barry, frowning. "Rather queer, isn't it? If we could get hold of him, it might be well to take him with us. Well, it is quite possible he will be there, anyhow. If he knows who the thief is, he ought to be able to trail him up to Lewis's. That seems a perfectly natural thing."

Bob nodded assentingly. It *did* seem natural.

"He may be working up this whole case by letting the thief know in some way that Lewis would buy the laces," went on Barry, shrewdly. "That prisoner of yours could help us to find out, I believe, if you could make him talk. He's an obstinate devil. But there ought to be some way of making him loosen up."

"He's scared of somebody," said Bob, seriously. "He knows what his kind do to what they call 'squealers,' Barry."

"H-m! I haven't much use for men who'd go back on their pards myself," admitted Barry. "Even a horse-thief—if there is any white blood in him—won't double-cross his pals. I've seen 'em with the rope around their necks refuse to save themselves by giving away the rest of the gang. Still, that doesn't help us about the laces. Going up to see this Kid Griffin, Bob?"

"Yes. After a night's sleep, he may be more tractable and answer some questions," remarked Bob. "I'll go up there now."

"Keep him hungry," suggested Barry. "There's nothing like a little starving to bring 'em to time."

Bob did not confess that he'd had a breakfast sent to Kid Griffin. He did not agree with Barry Oliver in everything. So he went up and remained more than an hour with the now much cowed wharf-rat. Whether he got anything out of him he did not tell anybody. He only shook his head non-committally when Barry asked him in the hotel lobby afterward.

But Kid Griffin went in the taxicab with Barry, Lucy, and Bob Tower to the high building in which, on the eighth floor, Samuel Lewis had his business establishment.

The cab stopped a block away, and Bob told Barry that they were going in by the back entrance on the side street, where goods were delivered and received.

"We're two hours ahead of time," remarked Bob. "But this fellow with the laces is quite likely to be on the watch to see whether anybody goes up to Lewis's place with the intention of trapping him. We may beat him by taking the freight elevator in the rear."

"Can you do that? Will the men at the elevator let us go up that way?" objected Barry.

"My uniform as an officer will carry us through," smiled Bob, confidently. "They 'll suppose it is government service. Nobody questions army officers these days, no matter what they do."

"Smart boy!" commended Barry, grinning. "Come on! Look out for that prisoner of yours."

"I have him," was Bob Tower's quiet reply, as he kept his strong fingers twisted into Kid Griffin's sleeve

Suddenly Lucy whispered, as she gazed earnestly down the street at the main entrance of the sky-scraper, where dozens of persons were going in and out of the revolving doors:

"*Look!* Isn't that Mr. Jones? That

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tall, thin man, with his soft hat pulled down over his forehead? *See!* By the door!"

"Where?" blurted out Barry. "Did you see Jones? Where is he?"

But Barry was too late. The tall man had disappeared into the doorway.

CHAPTER XI.

KID GRIFFIN TALKS.

SAMUEL LEWIS had several rooms on the eight floor of the great building, and in all of them were displayed examples of the fine arts that made the place an Elysium to the collector.

Rare porcelains, old silver cunningly fashioned by men of age-old fame, splendid fabrics of all kinds, including ivory laces, some of which were as priceless as those in the Trevelyan collection, jades, onyxes, cameos, mosaics, and precious stones whose names the ordinary observer could not tell, jewels from India, strange utensils from Pompeii and Herculaneum, ivories from China, pictures from everywhere—all these and more were disposed along the walls and in glass cases in the center of the spacious lofty rooms.

Samuel Lewis could tell the history of every piece and its present value without referring to a catalogue. He was an art expert in the fullest sense of the term.

"The man telephoned he would be here at two," he remarked calmly, when Barry blustered into Lewis's reception room, where the proprietor himself bowed a welcome to Lucy, his square face and turned-down mouth showing no evidence of anxiety.

"But I'm glad you came ahead of time," he said. "If you'll sit down in my private room, you can hear and see everything through these slats in the partition, without being observed by any one outside."

He indicated a series of slits ingeniously devised to give Mr. Lewis himself a perspective of his whole domain when he happened to be shut in—a rather necessary arrangement considering that it was not at all an uncommon thing for strangers to browse at will among his show-cases, often without making purchases. The Lewis collection was famous among lovers of curios.

"You haven't found out who the man is, I suppose?" asked Bob, as they strolled through the rooms, with Lucy Oliver going into ecstasies at every step as she discovered some new wonder, and Barry regarding the display with the restrained admiration of an expert. "Did he write you at any stage of your dealings with him?"

"No," replied Lewis, promptly. "I've heard his voice over the phone, that's all, and it tells me nothing, for he spoke in a low, but distinct tone. I should say, however, that he is a young man."

"Well, we shall know when he comes," returned Bob. "He will come into this reception room from the hall, of course?"

"Yes. This is the main entrance. There are no center show-cases here, as you see. They would be rather in the way. Well, when you have looked around a bit, you can come into my room. I would advise you to come soon, because we don't know when our man will arrive."

This was a good suggestion from Samuel Lewis, for the party had not more than become comfortably settled, a little after one, in the inner office, with the door shut, when a tall, slim man, carrying a traveling-bag—not a yellow suit-case—walked slowly into the reception room and looked about him.

The man was clad in an ordinary business suit, with a soft hat, and there was nothing peculiar about him—except that he wore a small black mask which concealed his nose and mouth, but allowed his keen eyes freedom between the top of the mask and the brim of his drawn-down hat.

He seemed to have just put on the mask, for he was still adjusting it as he stepped into the reception room.

Samuel Lewis was there alone, and he expressed no surprise, either in word or manner, at the apparition of a masked stranger in his establishment. He looked at him as coolly as if it were an every-day experience in Fifth Avenue places of business for burglarious-looking persons, with covered faces, to come in about two o'clock in the afternoon and stand in silence, looking at the proprietor.

"Trevelyan?" said Samuel Lewis, in quiet interrogation, when the man did not speak.

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"Yes," was the reply. "Are you ready to talk business?"

It was obvious that the man was endeavoring to disguise his natural tones, for he spoke in a high, wheezing voice which broke in the middle, as if it were a strain.

"Let me see the laces," was Lewis's response. "There is a table over by the wall."

The man did not move except to turn his head in the direction of the door in the partition behind which Bob Tower, Barry and Lucy Oliver were looking and listening at the slats, with Kid Griffin trembling behind them.

"Who's in that room?" he demanded bruskly, and Samuel Lewis noted that his mysterious visitor forgot to disguise his voice, and spoke in deep, half-angry, half-frightened tones. "Anybody there?"

Samuel Lewis shrugged and smiled easily.

"It's my private office. Let's go in there."

He walked over and placed a hand on the knob, as if to open the door. But the man stopped him with a hasty gesture, and strode to the table near the wall.

"Never mind," he grunted. "I reckon you wouldn't want anybody around to see you make this deal. You know the price?"

"Fifty thousand?" replied Lewis calmly.

"That's right. And it's dirt cheap. *You'll* get more than a hundred thousand." The high, wheezing voice was in use again. "I want this in bills of a hundred each. I told you that."

"Yes," assented Lewis, without emotion. "Hundred-dollar bills. You told me that. Ten packages of five thousand dollars each."

"That's what. I don't want any bigger money than that. You might have the numbers of the notes, and if they were a thousand apiece, I might have trouble. Centuries are common. I don't care if you have the numbers of those. Only banks would get on to them, and I don't deal with banks much. Where is the money?"

"Let me see the laces," was Lewis's rejoinder. "I can get the money out of my safe easily enough when I know you have the goods."

"All right. Here they are!"

It was evident to Bob and Barry that the man, whoever he was—and Bob thought he recognized the voice, in spite of the wheeze, to say nothing of his having heard it when undisguised for a fleeting period—did not fear Lewis, and they had no doubt that he would not hesitate even at murder if it became necessary for his safety.

In another moment the traveling-bag was open, and the Trevelyan laces, in a disordered heap, were on the long polished table. It made Barry shiver as he saw the precious collection thrown out as if it were a bundle of old rags.

But Samuel Lewis made no sign. He went through the pieces one by one, as if to assure himself they were all there. Then suddenly he looked up sharply into the masked visage at his side.

"Where is the Catherine de Medici piece—the collar?" he demanded sternly.

"I don't know anything about it," snarled the man. "I've brought all the laces that came to me."

"But the Catherine de Medici is the most valuable of them all. It is worth ten thousand in itself. If you haven't got that, you can't expect me to pay you the full amount. I bargained for *all* the Trevelyan laces."

Kid Griffin heard this, and in his excitement was going to pull open the door and rush out. But Bob seized him by the collar and, as he dragged him back, gave him in silence a menacing look that cowed him, and he sank back into a chair with a low whine of terror.

The man gathered the laces up and was putting them in the bag, as if the deal were off, when Lewis stopped him by placing a hand on his arm, as he said evenly:

"Don't be hasty. We can arrange this matter. Come into the private room, where my safe is."

It had been agreed that this was to be done, and of course Bob and Barry were both ready to leap on the thief as he entered.

Samuel Lewis replaced the laces in the bag and carried it himself, the stranger watching him jealously over the rim of his black mask.

They had just reached the door, and

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Samuel Lewis's fingers were on the handle, when a howl of rage sounded behind them, and a tall, slim man bounded forward from the outer entrance, and tearing off the thief's mask with one hand, sent a bony fist into his cheek-bone that staggered him.

"You double-dealing, cheap crook!" screeched the newcomer. "I knew I'd land you! Take this!"

It was William Jones who had come rushing into the room, and the man who had worn the mask was a stranger to Bob Tower and every one else in the room, except Jones, who evidently knew him well.

For a moment the man who had tried to sell the laces wavered, in his surprise. But now, before Jones could land on him again, he had recovered, and, parrying the blow aimed at his jaw, shot one against Jones's eye that knocked him backward.

Then the two men—and Barry noted that Jones was much stronger than he looked—went in for such a fight as was never seen in that building, before, and not often anywhere else.

They exchanged several sledge-hammer blows, and then stood off for an instant, eying each other, looking for an opening.

It was William Jones who took up the offensive again. He tried a right swing, missed, and, as the other uppercut him savagely, grappled, and the two went to the floor.

They punched, gouged, bit, tore like wild stallions as much as anything—and for ten minutes it was impossible for anybody to interfere.

Samuel Lewis, cool as ever, but keeping an eye on the fighters to make sure they did not carry the battle into the next room, where the show-cases were, walked to the outer door and closed it. The building had sound-proof walls and floors, and he was not afraid of any one outside hearing the noise of the fray when the door was closed. He occupied the whole of the eighth floor.

Suddenly, a gurgling groan told that the man of the mask was in dire straits, and Bob seized William Jones's arms to pull him off.

Jones had his long fingers in the throat of his adversary. When at last he let go and arose to his feet, the man on the floor was quiet, with eyes half-closed, while his purple face was that of one who had been strangled.

"Who is that?" asked Bob Tower, pointing to the unconscious man.

"His name is Macey Gibbons," replied Jones, gasping for breath, for he had had a hard time to subdue his foe. "He's a thief!" he added, scornfully.

Then came a surprise for Jones, as well as Bob and Barry, when Kid Griffin, rushing out of the private office, where he had remained during the fight, peeping at it through the slats in the partition, screamed wildly:

"Don't mind what that guy says, captain—that Jones. He's the crook what stole the laces in the fust place. Macey on'y got 'em afterward. This here Jones—his real name's Beau Landon—was tryin' to beat Macey out o' his bit—'cause Macey fust got on to these here laces comin' to New York—an' Macey pinched the goods from Jones an' come here to make a sale of 'em."

"You're not going to take any notice of what this pickpocket says, of course, Captain Tower?" said Jones, with a feeble laugh. "It's queer what fellows of this sort will say when they are in trouble. He's associated with Macey Gibbons, and I guess we'd better arrest them both."

Jones had been edging his way along the partition, with an evil eye on Kid Griffin. But Bob got in his way, unostentatiously, but effectively.

"Wait a minute, Mr. Jones!" he interrupted. "We may as well hear what more Griffin has to say. Go on, Kid," he continued. "What proof is there that Mr. Jones had anything to do with stealing the laces? Be careful now! Don't lie! This is a serious matter."

"You bet it's serious—for *him!*" shouted Kid Griffin desperately. "I'm goin' to tell the trut' now. I'd ha' done it before on'y he'd ha' killed me if he'd knowed I told on him. Maybe he'll do it anyhow, but—"

"No, he won't!" interposed Bob. "I'll promise he won't hurt you."

William Jones's big nose dilated dangerously, and his yellow eyes shot gleams of

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deadly hate at both Kid Griffin and Bob Tower, as the wharf rat went on:

"He made me pinch the suit-case from the taxi. He put up the job, an' it was all a stall him purtendin' to try an' ketch me when I beat it after swingin' the sandbag on Mr. Oliver there. Then, when you come to the room at Donovan's, he was takin' prints of the laces. You seen the stove an' the hot irons, didn't yer? An' what's more, I got some of the prints right here, to prove it. You know I wouldn't know how to do it even if I wanted ter. But Jones—Beau Landon—is a smart crook, an' he can do t'ings like that. Here's them prints!"

He tore from inside his shirt several impressions that Barry Oliver and Samuel Lewis at once recognized as part of the Trevelyan laces. He gave them to Bob, who quietly passed them to Barry.

"I guess I'd better go if you are going to pay any serious attention to this maniacal talk," said Jones, with an ugly grin, as he made a sudden move toward the outer entrance.

"Wait!" thundered Bob, with a hand on his arm. "You can afford to listen to it —*if you're innocent.*"

"Innocent?" sneered Jones. But he stayed.

"Feel in his inside pocket!" screamed Kid Griffin. "Quick! Here!"

Kid Griffin had a reputation among his associates of being one of the slickest pick-pockets in New York, and how he got a flat package from Jones's inside pocket without seeming to touch him must be ascribed to his magnificent technique.

"Look!" he cried, as he tore the package open. "There they are! Look at 'em!"

"Trevelyan laces—more of 'em, by the eternal!" roared Barry Oliver.

"Yes, an' they's more proofs!" continued Kid, heedless of everything but denouncing the now discomfited, mouthing Jones. "Take him to headquarters an' let 'em look up his record. That's all you have ter do! An' I don't care if I get a ten-year stretch up the river! I've told the trut', anyhow!"

At that moment, William Jones shot out one of his feet and tried to trip Bob Tower. The attempt was unsuccessful, and the next instant Bob sent him reeling backward with a jab to the jaw that had behind it the steam of an athlete in good training.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RULING PASSION.

WILLIAM JONES did not attempt to return the blow at first. His main idea seemed to be to get out of the place. He darted to the outer door, swung it open, and would have made a bolt for the stairs, without waiting for the elevator. But luck was against him. Right in the doorway he came into collision with an elderly man who swore lustily and butted him back to the middle of the room.

The swearing gentleman was the redoubtable Colonel Coleberry, and mustache, imperial, and pompadoured hair all bristled with indignation.

"Hell and blazes!" he roared. "What the devil does this mean, Lewis? Can't a gentleman come to look over your collection without being knocked down in the doorway. Who *is* this person?" he demanded, glowering at Jones.

"Get out of my way, you old ass!" snarled Jones, making for the door.

"Wow! Gr-r-r-r!" roared the colonel.

Colonel Coleberry was seventy-seven years of age, but the vicious blow he aimed at Jones's chin would have done execution had it landed.

But Jones blocked it with his elbow, and, heedless of the white hair of his assailant, would have knocked him down with a savage counter-attack.

Before he could send his blow home, however, Bob Tower caught him by the shoulder, twisted him around and sent in another sledge-hammer blow to the chin in about the same place that he had landed before.

Jones backed away, staggering, while the colonel bobbed about him, whirling arms, like a pugnacious jumping-jack.

"Come away from him, Captain Tower!" shouted the old gentleman. "This fellow is mine, I tell you! I can lick five such damned scoundrels before breakfast any morning. He called me an old—"

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Colonel Coleberry choked on the scandalous epithet. He simply could *not* bring himself to say it as applied to himself. Instead, he rushed at his enemy headlong.

Unfortunately, Bob attacked Jones at the same instant, and in the mix-up the colonel was sent spinning across the room, dazed and temporarily helpless, but as full of fight as ever.

"Jumping Jehoshaphat!" he bellowed. "Where is that scalawag? Let me get into this scrap!"

But he couldn't, valiantly as he tried, with arms, legs, voice and all in full action. Jones was fighting in desperation—for he knew it meant a prison cell if he were captured—and Bob Tower was determined he should not get away. So the battle surged all over the reception room, with the colonel always in the way.

It was a hard time for the old Civil War hero. Somehow, he was always getting assaulted, with no chance for reprisal. He was hustled, jounced, shoved, kicked, punched, elbowed, and bumped, over and over again. And with it all he had not been able to land one punch on his own account. It was heart-breaking!

"Here, you selfish devil!" he bawled at Bob. "Captain Tower! Stand back a minute, and let me get in! You're not a gentleman, sir, to interfere in another gentleman's quarrel. I tell you, sir—"

Just then the two combatants fell into a clinch, and the colonel was bunted backward until he found himself jammed against the wall, with Jones's shoulders against his face.

"Get away, sir!" screamed the colonel. "Take your cursed unpleasant, bad-smelling carcass off my nose, sir! I'll break you in two, sir, when I get my hands on you! What the devil do you mean, sir?"

But the fight went on, regardless of Colonel Coleberry or anybody else in the room. Jones fought because he had to, if he hoped to save himself from the police, and Bob Tower was avenging himself for all the trouble this sly, impudent thief had cost him in the past forty-eight hours, and particularly for certain leers he had seen Jones cast at Lucy Oliver when lounging about the Supremacy.

Bob had not said anything about the obvious attempts of this tall, big-nosed cad to attract Lucy's attention with his clumsy gallantries, but he had promised himself the pleasure of giving him a lesson in decent behavior at the first convenient opportunity. Now that chance had brought it to him sooner than he had anticipated, he rejoiced and made the most of it.

It was not a very long fight, after all. While the colonel continued to dodge in and out, getting an occasional random kick and cuff, and blowing off profane steam at the top of his voice, Bob wore down his foe, and at last, steadying him with a light tap on the chest with his right, sent in his left fist for what is called, in professional fight circles, the "sleep punch" on the point of the jaw.

William Jones lay stretched out by the side of the slowly recovering Macey Gibbons, and Lucy was solicitously examining a cut knuckle on Bob's left hand, and begging him to let her bathe it in cold water under the tap of the ice-water tank, when a shout from Barry in the private room suggested more trouble.

"Lewis! Lewis! Come here!"

"What's the matter, Oliver?" asked Samuel Lewis, startled a little out of his usual calm by Barry's vehemence. "What do you want?"

"The laces!" cried Barry. "Where are they?"

"On my table in there, aren't they?"

Samuel Lewis rushed into his private office, and Lucy and Bob followed. Barry was wildly tearing about the room, searching under chairs and tables, and at intervals calling to Lewis.

"They were in the bag, on that desk," were Lewis's first words, as he looked around. "Don't you see the bag, Oliver?"

"It was here before that Jones came in," replied Barry. "I saw it on the desk myself."

"Where's the Kid?" asked Bob suddenly.

"That's the solution, of course," he went on. "The Kid's gone—and the laces with him. A thief is a thief, and he'll steal even when he could make more by being honest, as in this case. You can't beat the ruling passion. Wait a moment!"

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He dashed out of the private room, ran through the chain of show-rooms, assured himself that Kid Griffin was not in any of them, and then swung the outer door of the reception room wide open.

"Hello, Kelly! Did you get him?" asked Bob of somebody outside.

"Yes, sir," boomed a deep voice. "Here's the bird!"

Kelly, in full uniform, appeared in the doorway, holding by the neck in one hand the cringing Kid Griffin, and in the other the bag of Trevelyan laces.

"Well, I'm glad we've got them back," remarked Samuel Lewis. "Barry Oliver has had trouble enough about them. But how came this officer to be on hand right in the building?" he added, evidently puzzled.

"I arranged with Kelly to be here," said Bob quietly. "He knows this Kid Griffin—and Jones, too, I find. So I told him to be on the lookout, and when he saw the laces—or the bag—to grab them, as well as the person who happened to have them, and bring them to me. I was not sure that there would be anything for him to do, but I was determined not to lose anything for lack of caution!"

Just then Bob happened to catch Lucy's eye, and as he saw the pink mounting in her soft cheek, and noted how the dimples came and went, as they always did when she was pleased, he could almost have forgiven the Kid for stealing the laces since it had given him—Bob—a chance to recover them and win that look from her.

"Where was he, Kelly?" he asked, turning to the policeman. "Where did you get him?"

"Just going to sneak down the stairway. If he'd slipped into the elevator, he'd have had a better chance—although of course I'd have nabbed him, anyhow," continued Kelly, unwilling to admit that his captive ever had one chance in a million of eluding his vigilance.

"Well, as soon as I saw who it was, and that he had a bag, I made the pinch before he could put up the beginning of a spiel. He had one ready when I had him, about how he was taking the bag to the next floor for somebody, and all that kind of bunk. We are used to hearing stuff of that kind, and it only makes us laugh."

"What's up?" called out Barry, as he caught sight of the policeman. "Found out anything?"

"It's the laces, Barry!" called out Bob, as Barry came rushing over to him. "This fellow had them. Kid Griffin! He'd been telling me in that room at the Hotel Supremacy that he meant to go straight from now on—across his heart, and so forth. But—once a thief always a thief—in most cases. I'm afraid the Kid is hopeless."

"Sure he is," put in Kelly positively. "I know his gang. Hang around Donovan's most of the time. There's only one cure for them, and that's a trip up the river. What 'll I do with him, sir? Take him to the station?"

"I suppose so," answered Bob. "What do *you* say, Barry?"

Barry was carefully going over the laces that came from the bag, and checking them off, with those they had taken from Jones. He had just satisfied himself that he had the whole collection now, with the exception of the Medici collar, and he heaved a great sigh of relief.

"What did you say, Bob?" he asked, absently, his eyes still on the laces.

"I was asking what we should do with Kid Griffin," replied Bob, smiling at Barry's preoccupation. "I was thinking of sending him to the police-station—at least, for the present."

"I'd be willing to see him hanged," declared Barry, shortly. "But I suppose jail is the only thing we can do with him."

"All right, Kelly," said Bob. "Then suppose you take him. And while you're about it, get some help and take those two fellows on the floor. You may need a wagon. But get them out of here."

"Yes," broke in Lewis. "I wish you would. I've never had such a performance as this in my place since it was opened. It looks more like a barroom after a scrap than an art importer's show-rooms."

Sam Lewis was noted for his imperturbability, but he certainly showed some irritation now. It must be admitted that he had considerable provocation, for not only had there been a disturbance in his

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establishment which was very obnoxious to a man of his quiet habits, but he knew certainly now that the Trevelyan laces could never be sold to his customers—unless at some time he might be able to purchase them of Colonel Coleberry. That, however, he knew was practically hopeless—so long as the colonel lived, at all events.

"I suppose you can attend to these arrests, Kelly?" asked Bob, as a sudden doubt seized him. "This isn't your precinct, is it?"

"A New York policeman's on duty wherever he happens to be, sir," was Kelly's virtuous reply. "I'm glad you got the laces, sir. That big chump, Macey Gibbons, is a pretty slick crook. But he isn't in it with Beau Landon—who calls himself William Jones. No, sir, Jones is about the smoothest I know. If you're going to push him through you'll have to look out for him. He'll get a good lawyer and slip away yet unless you clamp him down."

"I'll clamp him," promised Barry grimly. "Hey, colonel! Here!"

Colonel Coleberry had not heard anything about the laces being stolen, it must be remembered, and it only now began to dawn on him that he might be personally interested.

"What do you want, Barry?" he responded. "Wait a moment, will you?" He was gazing down at the feebly squirming and only half-conscious Jones. "I'd like to give this pesky coyote the thrashing he deserves," he mused. "But I don't see how I can till he gets over this. Just my luck! All right, Barry! I'm coming. What are these laces you are making such a fuss about?"

His eye fell on the neatly-folded laces on the table, where Barry was still arranging them, and he howled with excitement. "Great jumping Jupiter! Do you mean to say they are—"

"Yes, colonel," replied Barry, with a more cheerful smile than he had worn since he knew the laces were stolen. "These are the Trevelyan laces."

"They are? And they've been *stolen?*" shrieked Colonel Coleberry, turning to glower at Jones and Macey Gibbons. "Good God! Why—er—it seems impossible! *Stolen!* The Trevelyan collection! Here! Give them to me! By the Lord, they don't go out of my hands again!"

He gathered up the whole bundle, stuffed it into the bag, and wrapped his arms around it with a defiant frown.

"Now, get a taxi and let's hurry back to the hotel. I want to show them to Mrs. Coleberry. Lucy, my dear, are you coming with me?"

"I've telephoned for two taxicabs," announced Lewis, in his quiet way. "You'll need two for all your party." Then, turning to Kelly: "How are you going to get your prisoners to the station? Taxicab?"

"No, sir. It's a wagon for ours," replied Kelly. "I'll have one here in ten minutes, with some more officers. I took the liberty of telephoning the station from your office while you were looking at the laces."

The wagon with the three handcuffed prisoners, guarded by three policemen besides Kelly, moved away from the rear of the big building just as two taxicabs left the front entrance. In one of the taxis was Colonel Coleberry, the laces, and Barry. Lucy and Bob Tower were in the other. Is it necessary to say that Bob made this arrangement?

"How lucky that you found the laces, isn't it?" were Lucy's first words as the cab started. She had not seemed to notice that Bob's hand had stolen over to hers in the gloom. "You suspected Jones always, didn't you?"

"Confound Jones!" was Bob's inward remark. Then aloud, in offhand tones: "Yes, it was easy to see through him. I knew there was another man, too, though I couldn't get his name out of Griffin. That was Macey Gibbons. It seems Jones was trying to cheat the Kid and Gibbons out of their share of the plunder. That's what caused Jones's downfall. You know the axiom: 'When thieves fall out,'" he laughed.

"Yes. But how splendidly you worked it all out. I suppose that's what military men call 'strategy,'" she said thoughtfully.

He did not answer for a moment. Then, all the offhandedness gone from his low, vibrating voice, as unconsciously he tight-

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ened his grasp on her fingers. "I wish I were strategist enough to induce you to let me tell something that was on my lips last night when you stopped me."

"I—I don't understand," she faltered.

But she fibbed—fibbed like a—well, like a girl whose beating heart chokes back the truth just because she *is* a girl.

Bob Tower's lips were so dry that he had to pass his tongue over them feverishly. At last he blurted out:

"I used to call you my sweetheart when you were a little girl. May I call you that now?" He had bent so that he could look directly into her starry eyes as they were lighted up momentarily by occasional street lamps. "May I?"

She was so long before she spoke that he was afraid he had offended her. But at last came a murmur: "How can I help what you call me?"

Well, of course she *could* have helped it, and Bob knew it.

"Then you will give me the right?" he whispered.

"I can't give what you've already taken," she fenced.

"And you really mean that, with all it implies?" God, how his heart thumped!

"Hotel Supremacy?" suddenly barked the driver through the front window.

"Yes," thundered Bob. "That's what I told you."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Lucy, and Bob warmed within as he saw she was genuinely annoyed. "I didn't think we were anywhere near the hotel as yet."

She looked up shyly at him in the semi-darkness—for they were at the back of three other cabs drawing up to the entrance. The dimples danced in her cheek and about her delicately-curved, rich, red lips, as she breathed, her voice as low as a summer night breeze in a rose garden:

"What was it you asked me?"

Bob may have said something, but it was so ejaculatory as to be incoherent. Anyhow, he took her in his arms—dimples, starry eyes, lips, ruddy-gold hair, and all—and held her there!

She ran to the elevator, flushed and slightly disheveled, as soon as she could, and Bob did not see her for an hour. When she reappeared her hair was in order, and every item of her costume as neat as usual.

"I've told Barry!" she whispered to Bob, as they sat together for a few moments in that magnificent reception room where the decorative desks were, waiting for Barry. "He is *glad*." She paused, and Bob thought her blush was heavenly. Then she added, with outrageous candor, but not looking into his face: "I *knew* he would be."

Colonel Coleberry insisted on their all dining with him, ostensibly to "celebrate the recovery of the Trevelyan laces," as he put it.

Barry Oliver never could keep anything to himself—at least, Lucy said so—so after dinner, when Colonel Coleberry had his cigar going to his satisfaction, he slapped Bob Tower violently on the back, and whispered huskily:

"You're a confounded lucky young cuss, Tower. But, by gad, sir, I believe you deserve your luck!"

(The End.)

AN EPITAPH

THE cat was sitting on a bench—
The Friar read beside.
A boy took up his gun and fired,
And pussy died.

The startled Friar closed the book
He read and donned his hat,
Then murmured, as he moved away:
"Requiescat!"

Joseph P. Hanrahan.

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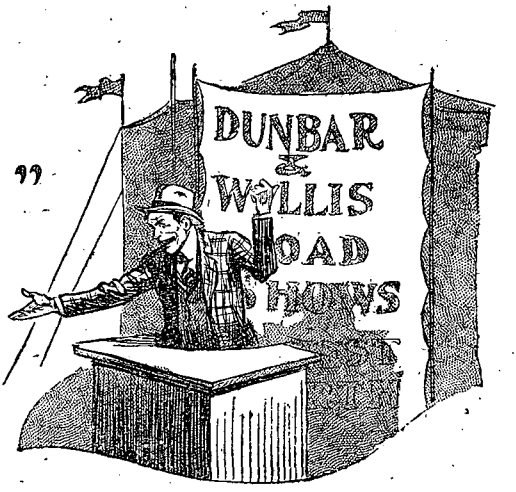
"Such a Liar!"

by Miriam Michelson



HE bustled in upon Dunbar one day when our show was about to leave for the West.

"I want to be your press-agent, old sport," he said briskly.

"Got one," growled the old man, and turned his back on him.

"Ha!" The exclamation was emphasized by a thumping slap on the manager's lean shoulder. "But you ain't got me, my love."

The old man turned, and, as soon as he had his breath, he said things. They were confused, ill-assorted things, hastily expressed, but Dunbar has been running circuses for thirty years now, and no one is ever in doubt as to what he means. He finished by repeating the youngster's sentence with variations.

"No, we ain't got ye—yet," he said as though he was biting chains. "But we'll get ye, Johnny, and powder ye so fine they won't know ye're meat when we feed ye to the jackals. Now, will you get out quick?"

"Nary," declared the youngster with a laugh.

His voice might have been fathered by a bass drum and mothered by a steam calliope; its gentlest note was a bellow that would make an Arizona burro envious, and when he wanted really to make himself heard, the megaphone barkers outside the entrance just naturally declined to argue the matter.

"Nary a jackal-meat party you get out o' Billy Burns," he went on, "he's too valuable—too valuable to you, dear old friend!"

He tapped Dunbar pleasantly on the chest, and the old man glowered blacker than thunder clouds.

With his pepper-and-salt hair, his long, thin nose, and his yellow-gray eyes too close together, Dunbar looks like the leader of that pack of gray wolves we got from Alaska. Most folks don't care to annoy 'em. But this fresh-faced fellow had the gall of a short-tailed monkey that started one day while on parade to guy Bildiz, the black tiger.

"You can't afford it, deary," he went on, and his brass-band voice boomed through the tent. "Smart advertisers come too high. But I'll come to you—as press agent, not jackal hash—for just twenty per cent less than the cardboard faker you've got costs you. He gets two hundred per; I'll get one-sixty. You'll get double the value on the money you pay me, and the twenty per cent rake-off besides."

"H-m!" coughed the old man. His cough was a sneer, just like the gray wolf's. But clipping wages was his passion; he'd dream nights of all-round reductions and wake good-natured, scheming to make his dream come true.

"Yes," nodded the youngster encouragingly. "Perhaps you'd like to know the name of your new press-agent. Here!"

He scratched a few words in the corner of a card and tossed it complacently down on the desk. It read, "Hustling Billy

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Burns." A line had been drawn through the Novelty Theater, and he had hastily written in the corner Press-Agent Dunbar & Willis's Road Shows.

Old Dunbar's heavy-lidded yellow eyes lighted on it and turned away. There was about as much encouragement in his leathery face as in my old camel Josephine's, when the gentlemen of her party think they're particularly entertaining.

But d'you think that feezed Hustling Billy? He just waited. Yep, waited there while the old man humped over at his desk pretended to get busy; and his attitude was easy and confident, with the cheerfullest smile in the world on his shovel-mouthed, shining face.

That way of waiting fetched Dunbar. You don't meet too many folks that can wait that quiet, sure way. Most of 'em can't camouflage when it comes to just shutting up and sitting still.

"So you think you're a better man than Meadows, eh?" the old man sneered.

"Oh, child!" exclaimed Billy softly (as softly as he knew; his tunes were all played with the hard pedal), and he spread out his hands like one too fastidious to praise himself, and too plaguey sure of himself to deign to be insulted.

The old man chuckled. He was lost.

"But why twenty per cent less?" he asked.

The youngster unbuttoned the top button of his coat and relaxed. I've seen Juana, the lioness, relax just that way when her meat's in sight; she'll raise the dead with her howls at feeding time till she sees me coming, but once she's sure I'm there she don't trouble any more. Neither did Billy. He drew his chair up to the desk with the air of a man that belongs, and said earnestly, "Because of Meg Mintar."

The old man stared. "Meg who? Oh, McIntyre. What's she got to do with it?"

"Is her sure-enough name McIntyre?" roared Billy. "Fine! Well, I love her, you know. Mad about her. Dead stuck on her. Down an' out. Bowled over. Clean gone on Meg McIntyre; that's me!"

Out in our tent, where his howls penetrated, we animal trainers broke into a guffaw he must have heard.

Dunbar stared at him harder than ever.

"Do you happen to be crazy?" he inquired.

"Oh, yes—yes, deary. Clean daffy I am about a brown-haired circus girl with a fresh, country face, hard, red cheeks like Spitzenburgs, jolly brown eyes, and legs—legs that can outleap, outjump, outhurdle anybody that I ever saw under a tent—or anywheres else."

"H-m!" sneered Dunbar. "So that—"

"Exactly," cut in Billy.

"I never thought much about McIntyre," said the old man dreamily.

"And you needn't bother to commence now, my lamb," interrupted the youngster hotly. "I'll do all that's necessary in that line."

"All right," he said. "Get busy and see what you can do."

"I will," said Billy, "both ways. You watch me."

He was worth watching. For he strutted straight across the ring like a plump little yacht in a favoring breeze, white vest nicely bellied out, hands in hind-pockets, and singing at the top of his lungs, to the woman's dressing-tent. 'Twas a din to drive a brass foundry mad with envy. It got on the nerves of Balaam, our trick ass; he opened his head and let out a zigzag accompaniment that seemed to make the canvas fill and fall like a bellows. And the thing Billy sang—a medley of all the ragchoruses you ever heard with their tunes in one red burial blent, and Meg Mintar's name for the refrain!

No wonder the girls came running out. (It was the half-hour before the afternoon's performance.) Meg came with them and stood staring, a strong, high-colored young thing; no rouge there; she used to say she would give a week's pay to any one who'd invent a whitewash that'd stay on.

"What ails ye, little boy?" cries Meg, buttoning the last button of her blouse.

"You—you, Meg McIntyre—you!" he sang, rushing up to her, arms outstretched.

"Get Harry, the beast doctor, to prescribe for ye quick, so you can stop howling," said she, dodging.

"There's only one medicine in the whole world will do that!" he cried.

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"An' that?" she demanded, arms akimbo.

"Not that—this!" he yelled, and took it in a flash from her lips.

Then whack! Her hand shot out, and his ears went red under the deft rat-tat she beat on them. He ducked and bellowed and she ran into the dressing-tent. He followed, but the girls wouldn't have a bull like that charging about the tidy place. Besides, it was against the rules.

After that we were not unprepared for the kind of courtship he put up. He howled love speeches at Meg across the ring; it didn't matter whether a performance was on or not, he megaphoned tender messages. Whenever he came in from work (and he could work) we'd hear him singing about her in a tuneless monotone before he'd got to the vacant lots; my one-horned rhinoceros might have sung like that if he had stuck up his nose out of the mud and suddenly decided to go in for grand opera.

Of course he got the men stirred up about her. When Bildiz, the tiger, begins to roar out love things, there isn't a male creature in its cage but gets the fever. Even big, blond, lazy Hempey, who does trapeze with Pauline Percival, opened his sleepy eyes on Meg. But Pauline was jealous, and Meg, though bold-tongued, had the clean woman's scorn for the sleek gambler Hempey was—the sleek lover, the sleek, selfish, handsome brute male.

It was great fun for her, though, to have one man forever bellowing love to her, and half the others attracted, excited by his howls. Grunwald, the clown, took to burlesquing Billy in the ring; but how could one burlesque a brazen, grinning boy who clowned it himself in the openest fashion? Meg throve under the courtship, got prettier, jauntier, saucier, stepped more proudly, held her head higher. The same thing happens when my pet cock-pheasant's love-making turns *his* mate's head. Every time Meg and Billy came within shouting distance there were fireworks, vaudeville.

"What made ye put that thing in the paper about me?" she demanded of him once with wrath that was only half-real.

"What thing?" he howled back. "That for love, just for pure love of you, Meg Mintar, Mr. Billy Burns, the twenty-thousand-a-year press-agent of Dunbar & Willis's Road Show, left his happy home an' ran away wid the circus?"

She nodded.

"Well, didn't he?" demanded Billy, coming closer.

"'He left a life of luxury,'" she quoted. "'The only son and heir of a fi-nancier—dropped all his college work—it near broke his ambitious father's heart!' Oh me, oh my, the poor young fellah!"

He grinned. "Oh, that part! That's fairy tales, my soul. But you're the particular person, to expect more'n half a poor press-agent's lie to be true. And the other part's true, Meg, so very true that—"

She interrupted. "Then it's lonesome it must be—the one little truth in a pack of lies."

"Not little, Meg," he protested; "big—immense! As for the pack of lies, they're a profitable pack, worth twice what Dunbar pays for 'em."

"Likely!" she said with a sniff. "If that's the case why don't ye get some one else to pay ye what ye earn?"

"'Cause no one else has got Meg Mintar in his show." He was at her elbow now. "When we're married, sweetness, you'll stop work, and I'll quit Dunbar and make double what I do now."

"What a long time ye'll have to wait for a raise," she said over her shoulder as she turned from him.

He giggled.

"I know it 'll seem long to you, Meg," he began consolingly, but the temper in her glance stopped him. "What makes ye think it 'll be long?" he inquired almost casually.

"Oh, sumpin tells me so," she said airily, walking away.

"Don't believe it. It's a liar like the rest of us. I'll marry you, Meg, before the summer's done."

"Ye will? Ye will!"

"Sure. Dollars to doughnuts," he shouted gaily, and left her on the run, for he'd got an idea, and a hustler's ideas are worth money.

The next day there was a piece in the paper that told how Hustling Billy Burns,

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the son of a prominent Western railroad and mine owner, who had run away from college romantically to follow the circus, was engaged to marry Meg Mintar, of Dunbar & Willis's Road Show. He had met her first, the paper said, at one of those trials of skill which Meg Mintar's magnificent hurdling had called forth at every college town the circus visited, when athletes were put on their mettle by this celebrated girl jumper. Billy Burns, the crack vaulter of his class, had met and been ingloriously downed by Hurdling Meg, and his heart had immediately acknowledged her as champion in another field. The marriage would take place before fall.

Meg boiled at that. She stormed down to the newspaper office to contradict it and to say sundry things about the "impudence of smart young press-agents." The contradiction was published the next day with a picture of Meg in her knickers and blouse, a bonny, trim young thing, taking a hurdle like a thoroughbred.

This was followed, of course, by a manly little interview with Hustling Billy in the evening paper; he held stanchly to the truth of the original tale, but, declared Billy to the sympathetic reporter, the premature and unauthorized announcement of the engagement had so offended Miss Mintar that, to his unspeakable sorrow, she had broken her troth. For his part, he would be faithful till death.

That wasn't the end of Billy's scheme; an idea with him works overtime and seven days in the week. There appeared in the paper another picture of Meg in simple, country-maiden style. (Billy had stolen it from the trunk-top which circus girls use for a dressing-table.)

Miss Mintar was a convent-bred young lady, the new story went, of aristocratic parentage; she had joined the circus at a fabulous salary upon the failure of her father, who had been a wealthy grain merchant. Miss Mintar was invariably carefully chaperoned by a widowed aunt, and it was her intention ultimately to return to that lady's home, after paying up her father's liabilities, there to teach physical culture and particularly the science of hurdling.

It was this last statement that started trouble; this, and the hipless, snug, short-skirt craze. For first thing you know, stout lady-swells of the city were coming down to the show and Miss Mintar was giving 'em physical culture, and making money, I tell you.

They came gingerly at first, and only the most forward ones; a tittering and exclaiming as though they were lost in Timbuktu and couldn't get used to us natives. But by and by they got cheekier and cheekier, like the monkeys do if you don't use your whip for every offense; and soon it was Miss Mintar here and Miss Mintar there, as bold as brass, bringing men dandies with 'em, and trailing round as though they owned the place, and all with that air of being within their rights, and diligently virtuous, and quite unconscious of criticism, that only females can put on.

It was the most strenuous course soft, fine ladies ever were put through, believe me. Meg was no lazy-bones, and she took her teaching seriously. But it was the most curious side-show ever attached to a circus, to have a purring lot of automobiles stopping outside Meg's little tent.

And then, the very night we left for the South, something happened. The girls whispered it at first. No, I think Billy printed it in one of the papers; but that was before it was true. When it did become true, and Hustling Billy heard of it, he rushed shouting to Meg's tent.

She was standing out in front beside a limousine in which sat a dame of many chins, corseted like a swollen beetle, and locked in a satin gown so scant she could hardly breathe. Both of 'em frowned at Billy, and Meg said, in the very tone she'd caught from the skin-tight cylinder in the car, "Pardon me, Mr. Burns, but at present I am engaged."

It was really an excellent imitation, but Billy didn't appreciate it. Before the lady's motor had rolled away he caught Meg by both hands.

"'Tain't true, Meg McIntyre, 'tain't true?" he begged.

She caught her hands from him and held them behind her. "What ain't?" she asked, chin in the air.

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"You're not quitting the show to stay here with these stuffed swells an' train 'em down?"

"You wrote it yourself an' put it in the paper; you ought to know if it's true or not," said the haughty Miss Mintar.

But I happen to know she wasn't so haughty as she tried to make him believe; she was only spoiled—what circus girl wouldn't be?—by all that nonsense of Billy's, and the swells' attention and their dollars had turned her head.

"Oh, I say, honey," he coaxed, "don't break up the family! What's to become of yours truly?"

She shrugged. 'Twas a trick she'd caught from Mrs. Jim Carey-Layton, old money-bags Layton's wife, leader of the town's fast young set. It riled Billy.

"Hey, Meg," he shouted, "whatever you do don't learn things from Mrs. Layton! She's the worst mixture of U. S. millions and French frocks and gutter-blood tastes. Compared to her, Pauline Percival is an angel. We all know what Hempey's Pauline is, but Mrs. Jim Carey-Layton, she's—she's— Phew!" He whistled, despairing of putting his estimate of the lady in words.

The blood burned in Meg's cheeks. She flushed so hard you wouldn't notice her usual high color for a second. It makes a decent girl that knows life blush to hear such disgust for a woman in a man's voice.

"Don't get in with that crowd, old girl," begged Billy. "Those swells have got cold little stones where their hearts ought to be; they'll use you, they'll play with ye a little while to please their lazy, idle selves with somethin' new, and then in a jiffy they'll drop ye. I'd rather trust ye to Harry's tigers; they'd only eat you alive, but those cruel, dainty, selfish beauties in the Carey-Layton set— Meg, 'tain't because—say, are you a snob?"

He asked it hesitatingly like one in doubt, which was a mistake. You mustn't say, "Are you a snob?" to a woman. You must put it, "*You're* not a snob!" For then, though she won't believe you, of course, knowing herself one, she'll think you believe yourself, and there's nothing in the world a female loves so much as that some man should think her better than she knows herself to be.

Meg didn't answer. She dropped her big old cape—it was just before she went out into the ring for her last turn—and stood a second in her little blue knickers, like a schoolgirl in a gym suit, but straight and sturdy and supple as only a professional can.

"Meg—Meg," Billy insisted, "you ain't fool enough to think they'll treat a circus girl like she was one o' themselves!"

That settled it.

"Never you mind whether I'm a fool or not. But I'll thank ye, Mr. Burns," she said, turning on the icy arctic stop, "not to put anything more about me in the papers; my pupils don't like it."

And out she ran. He bellowed after her. Catch Hustling Billy stopping his love-making for a little matter like an audience of two thousand! But she wouldn't listen to him.

It was a doleful hustler we carried off with us on our Southern circuit. And it was a mighty grumpy Dunbar that kept snapping at him all the way down.

The old man was furious at Meg's quitting. A short time previous—before Billy struck the circus—he wouldn't have known or cared if she had gone; but Billy's newspaper notices had made her an attraction that meant dollars in the box.

Dunbar's snarls, though, put the youngster on his mettle, and my camel Josephine! the fairy stories he did weave. He was the busiest young liar, flitting from one of us to the other, dressing us up in his yarns, till we didn't know each other or our very selves. But, just the same, his heart wasn't in it. He could write pretty fibs about Pauline Percival or Lollita, the equestrienne—whose name is Calkins; or about me being a philosopher, and my music for the beasts; or even about gruesome Redler, the contortionist—a human tarantula, that fellow! But Billy's stubby pencil was always aching to spell out the name of Meg Mintar.

He did write to her we knew, for before he sent his letters off, he would read 'em at the top of his lungs to the crowd of us. He would read her answers, too. But Lord

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knows how much of what he read was true; he was so used to romancing, he couldn't bear to tell just plain facts.

Still there must have been something to all that rigmarole he gave us. I suppose Meg was in society, in a way. It may be the swells did take her up as a fad and sort o' run after her. There's no doubt that she did go to Mrs. Hervey's ball and wear a rig the papers described; one of the dames must have given it to her when she got tired of it. And perhaps at Mrs. Carey-Layton's party at the swagger country clubhouse, her vicious brat of a son (by one of her other husbands) did drive Meg out in his runabout and Meg did hurdle it, from a jumping board—a record-breaking feat.

Hustling Billy gave us all of this, but I noticed he got peevish when Meg's letters spoke too often of young Carey-Layton. We had known the lad by sight. He used to haunt our tents, and once he got into a row with Hempey over Pauline.

Hempey could have broken him over his knee. He was the sort of son his mother deserved, but Billy didn't take any comfort out of the fact that Mrs. Carey-Layton had him. Neither did anybody else.

I wasn't surprised to find that the show was headed North and that we were to give a return performance in a certain good circus town where Miss Mintar was just then doing the grand in high life. Billy's sighs in themselves were enough to blow us northward; but how he had magic enough to convince the old man that 'twas good business to go back there, was a wonder. Maybe he did promise to lasso Meg and get her back to the ring. But that wasn't what happened.

We struck the town one night at nine forty-five; at ten there wasn't any trace of Billy, and by the time tents were up everybody under canvas had heard that he'd made a bee-line for the upper town.

Of course, we all knew the sequel soon. Billy bellowed the news to us some time after midnight.

"Wedding bells! Wedding bells! It's wedding-bells for me!" he sang.

We were turned in for the night and every tent dark. But Billy had something to say and, as soon as he could wake his audience, he began saying it.

He had found her in a shabby little lodging, that didn't match the picture she'd been drawing for Billy's benefit, curled up on a broken-springed lounge. She had sprained her ankle weeks before and, for lack of the right care, it was in a bad way.

"But Mrs. Carey-Layton sent me her own doctor—oh, a howling swell in a sable overcoat!—as soon as she heard of the accident," Meg cried to him eagerly on the heels of her explanations.

"Noble kind of her," said Billy.

"Yes, and Mrs. Hervey wanted to move me to a swagger hospital, but of course I wouldn't accept it."

"Course not," said Billy, down on his knees before the choked grate, trying to blow life into the stingy little fire.

"And—and young Carey-Layton sends me flowers every day," bragged Meg, shivering and pulling the torn cover up about her. "I just threw the last ones out a minute before you came."

Billy dropped the fire-irons with a clang.

"An' Miss Guiberson does send me such good things to eat—lobster 'n' ice-cream 'n' duck 'n'—" Meg's voice broke. She was mortal hungry. She couldn't keep it up.

Billy turned quickly. She was lying, a gaunt, shaking little heap, sobbing into her pillow.

He had her in his arms then in a minute, and she nuzzled her head into his shoulder, as though she'd found out what balm o' Gilead and the long, vacation mixed might feel like.

"Oh, Billy," she sobbed, "'tisn't true, not a word of it! Even before that bad little boy, Carey-Layton, wanted to marry me and they sent him away and all of them turned against me and wouldn't take lesson any more, they never treated me like anything but a—a plaything or a servant. But I was a fool an' thought they might some day. Such a fool! I just had to brag, I was so miserable an' lonesome an' hard-up. Billy, dear, I'm such a liar!"

"I know, chicken-child," he bellowed, joyously rocking her in his arms. "So'm I."

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Deep Water

by Edwina Levin and Beulah Poynter

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

ON a wager with his two friends—George Scovill and Elmer Morelle—Jimmie Freeman, man-about-town, broke into the boarded-up house, 53 East Ninetieth Street, the residence of the new-rich Peysons, absent in the Adirondacks. There Freeman was horrified to discover the apparently lifeless body of a beautiful girl with red hair, dressed in white, and with a necklace of pearls with a curious diamond and emerald pendant; but on returning with a policeman they found only emptiness—the girl had vanished.

At a charity bazaar Freeman was introduced to Martha Doré, a red-haired dancer, who bore an almost startling likeness to the supposedly murdered girl. Martha's stepfather, Rand Doré, lived at 51 East Ninetieth Street, the girl maintaining a separate establishment in an apartment on Central Park West. Jimmie became very much in love, and despite the girl's subtle discouragement of his suit, they finally became engaged. But when he visited her in her dressing-room at the Royale, he was shocked to see about her neck the identical necklace and pendant which had been worn by the beautiful stranger of the empty house.

Meanwhile the Peysons had been established in their Adirondack home—Mr. Peyson, a negligible domestic factor, but a financial power; his fat wife, ministered to by a masseuse, Mme. Sanchez; their daughter, Dorothy, a bridge fiend and enamored of Smith, a riding-master; and Abner Miles, servile yet mysterious secretary. Mrs. Peyson had given the masseuse the secret of the location of her jewel-safe, and, returning to town, she fainted on discovering that the safe had been opened and completely rifled.

Two plain-clothes men—Shannon and Garry—arrived, the former discovering on the metal surface of the safe the imprint of a slender, feminine hand—neither Dorothy's nor her mother's. While Mrs. Peyson was declaring her positive belief in the guilt of Mme. Sanchez, Shannon smothered an exclamation of surprise at something he had seen. Dorothy, watching him, saw what had disturbed him—a dark, brownish stain on the knob of the lock—a stain that looked like dried blood.

CHAPTER VII.

A RENDEZVOUS.

DOROTHY swayed, and the detective lifted her to her feet, his eyes meeting hers as she rose. Almost simultaneously he swung the door of the safe open so that none of the other occupants of the room could see what they had seen. Here Dorothy did a curious thing. Apparently she looked into the safe for the first time since discovery of the theft. She gave a startled cry anl staggered back.

"They're gone! They're gone!" she cried.

"Of course they're gone," said her mother in an exasperated tone. "That's what all this hubbub is about. Did you think I was having a joke on myself? Didn't I say they were gone?"

Miles hurried toward her solicitously.

"Shall I get you a glass of wine?" he asked. "This is too much of a strain for you!"

Dorothy shook her head and waved him aside. She almost staggered to the window-seat, and, sinking into it, pressed her white face against the cool glass. Her chin was quivering, and her plump, dimpled hands she locked and unlocked with nervous, quivery emotion.

Miles seemed uncertain what to do. Seeing that the attention had been drawn to herself and away from the safe, Dorothy laughed nervously and begged to be excused for a moment that she might compose herself.

"Poor child!" Mrs. Peyson murmured as she left the room. "She's been on such a strain. Our vacation was just one round

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of gaiety after another—bridge party after bridge party—and then to return and find we've been robbed is just too much for her! And she had to attend to every bit of it, for I am delicate! In spite of my appearance, I am delicate. And to think of Sanchez, after I trusted her!"

Neither Shannon nor Garry paid much attention to Mrs. Peyson's rambling conversation. Shannon broke in upon what seemed likely to become a dissertation on her health.

"How many servants have you?"

"Dear me, I don't know! I'll have to count. Isn't it strange—you know I never can tell offhand how many servants I have, or how many persons are at dinner, or—"

"Count," said Garry abruptly.

"There's Forbes, the butler; Lewis, the chauffeur; my maid and my daughter's—that's four, isn't it? And cook—that makes five; two housemaids, a general man, eight. Eight in all—and of course Miles; but Miles isn't a servant. He's Mr. Peyson's secretary."

"Get them here, please," Shannon said.

"Call them, Miles," Mrs. Peyson said wearily.

Abner Miles left the room in his usual apologetic way. As he did so he closed the door after him and stood just for a moment outside it; then he crossed the narrow hallway which led to Dorothy's rooms.

Her door was ajar. Through the opening he could see her reflection in the full-length mirror of her dressing-table. She was telephoning in her bedroom, which led off from her sitting-room.

Noiselessly Miles crept to the door and listened. Though she spoke softly, his keen, alert ears caught everything she said.

"Larchmont Riding Academy? Hello! I'd like to speak with Mr. Smith, please."

Miles stiffened visibly.

"Hello! Will? This is Dorothy. I can't speak any louder. Some one might hear me. Listen. I must see you at once; it's terribly important. You must get away—it's a very serious matter. I—yes—you must—it's about— All right. I'll meet you at the Fifth Avenue entrance of the Art Gallery in half an hour. Yes. You'll be there? All right. Good-by."

The telephone receiver clicked as she hung it up, and Miles disappeared down the stairs.

The servants were grouped together, discussing the robbery in awed voices. Forbes had instituted himself as master of ceremonies, and was doing most of the talking.

Miles had no need to state his errand. They followed him up the stairs in silence. Forbes held his head high in the air, as behooved a most impeccable character; the parlor maid was nervous and uneasy, her shifting green eyes taking in every detail of the room. The others seemed unimpressed.

The three officers of the law put them through a catechism, which after all was of no benefit, for it was clear that the servants had been hopelessly ignorant of the existence of the safe until the discovery of the robbery, and it was obvious that the imprint on the door was not of any hand in the room.

The servants were dismissed, and filed out of the room and down the stairs. Shannon turned to the reporters.

"I wish you gentlemen would vamose just now. I'd like to see this woman alone," he said as Mme. Sanchez came in, her black eyes glittering. The newspapermen, obviously disgruntled at thus being so unceremoniously dismissed, left the room. Garry had stepped into the shadow of a doorway as *madame* entered, and the policeman pulled a curtain about him. Thus, Shannon was the only person in plain view besides Mrs. Peyson.

Mme. Sanchez had her hat on, and was evidently on the point of going out. She drew off her gloves with a scornful smile. Her hands were beautiful, well formed, with long, tapering fingers. Shannon watched them as though fascinated.

Then she noticed the open safe. She started, looked at Mrs. Peyson, then for the first time realized the presence of Shannon. She seemed to grow green, and brushed back her hair, which she wore off her forehead and drawn tightly back.

"The safe!" she gasped. "That—is it?" She looked at Mrs. Peyson. "Why it is all these people are here and the safe is open?"

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"Mrs. Peyson has been robbed," said Shannon. "Her jewels are gone."

"Oh!" The masseuse dropped back on the chair which held her bag. Her eyes lit up with a peculiar gleam not unlike triumph; then she held up her shapely hands before exclaiming: "How terrible! How sorry I am, how very sorry!"

With difficulty Garry kept Mrs. Peyson silent.

"You knew of the existence of this safe?" said Shannon grimly. He crossed to her and stood facing her. "Mrs. Peyson told you she kept her jewels here?"

"Oh, yes," said Mme. Sanchez. "*Madame* very kindly make me her confidante, but fortunately she did not tell me the combination of the lock—and, see, some one opened it with the combination. Also she tell others!"

Her eyes were smiling, but there was a baleful gleam in them.

"How did you know the safe was opened with the combination?" asked Shannon sharply.

She paused the merest fraction of a second, then replied:

"I can see it show no violence. That is easy guess."

"Will you just step here for a minute?" he asked, going over to the safe.

Mme. Sanchez followed him with haughty indifference.

"Let me see your hand," he said.

She held up a slender, beautifully kept hand.

He examined it closely, compared it with the imprint on the safe door.

"Same!" he declared, straightening up. "Arrest this woman," he said to the policeman.

"If you do, I will sue the city for false arrest!" cried the woman, her black eyes like points of flame. "I lef' here ten minutes after Mrs. Peyson. I was talking with the butler when they lef'. He walk with me to the back door—see me leave house. I took nex' train for Mme. Peyson place in those Adirondacks. Is it not so, *madame?*" She turned to Mrs. Peyson.

"Yes, that's right!" cried that lady hysterically. "It couldn't have been Sanchez. She was with me all summer, and—"

"Call the butler," broke in Shannon.

The maid went for him, and he confirmed Mme. Sanchez's statement. She had not been out of his sight a minute after the family left. He saw her leave by the back door. She did not return before the servants finished closing up the house, which was at five thirty, an hour and a half after she was on her way to the Adirondacks.

"How do you explain that print of your hand on the safe door?" asked Shannon.

"I do not explain," she said with a shrug. "I do not know. I know only I have—how you say?—alibi; and if you arrest—"

"Garry, take her name and address, and see that she doesn't find business out of town," snapped Shannon.

With unutterable venom in voice and look she gave her address and went out.

Shannon then asked to see the imitation jewels.

"Tell Dorothy to fetch the jewels, Miles," said Mrs. Peyson.

Miles left the room silently. Crossing the hall quietly, he knocked on Dorothy's door, which was now closed. For a moment there was no sound within; then it was partially opened.

"What is it?" Dorothy inquired.

"Your mother wishes you to bring the imitation jewels, Miss Dorothy," Miles said.

"Oh, bother!" There was more than petulance in her tone.

When she appeared a little later she had changed her gown and was wearing a plain, very tailored brown suit. Apparently no one noticed the difference.

The imitation jewels were in a leather case which was lined with velvet and had small pockets. Dorothy handed the case to her mother, and stood leaning against the door, watching her as she opened it. Her eyes met Miles's, and she blushed painfully.

Mrs. Peyson lifted the baubles from their casing and let them fall in her lap. Even Shannon gave an exclamation of surprise. Dorothy's white lids drooped over her eyes. Her expression was inscrutable.

"By gad, they're pretty!" said Garry.

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"Who'd want the real article when there's fakes like these?"

"They are the exact replicas of the genuine," said Mrs. Peyson with pride.

"Why does your daughter keep them?" Shannon asked. He lifted a bracelet from her lap and examined it curiously.

"I wore them last," Dorothy answered quickly. "I often wear the imitations. Mother lets me, and my room is quite safe!"

Apparently Shannon cared little about the reply to his question. He was looking intently at the bracelet, carrying it to the window to examine it. It was rather a curious piece of workmanship; a diamond bracelet with tiny forget-me-nots of sapphires and emeralds on either side of the clasp. The necklace of diamonds had a pendant of the same design as did the earrings and brooch. There were two bracelets.

"Cost some money to make these imitations," he said at last. "I'd like to take this with me," he continued, "if you don't mind. It 'll help in tracing the genuine."

"Oh, no!" Dorothy cried in dismay.

"Why, Dorothy!" said her mother. "Of course he may take it. Miles, there's some tissue paper in my desk."

Miles got the paper and handed it to Shannon, who, taking it, wrapped the bracelet in it. He smiled apologetically at Dorothy, who bit her lips in apparent fury.

"I'll give you a receipt for it," he said, "and return it to you O. K. And now I guess we'd better be going. I'll phone you our progress."

As they turned to go, there was a knock on the door. Dorothy opened it, admitting Forbes.

"Here's a telegram for you," he said, extending an envelope to Mrs. Peyson.

She opened it nervously.

"Your father, Dorothy. Read it."

Dorothy read it aloud:

> "Am called suddenly to Chicago on business. Tried to telephone; line busy. Reach me at Blackstone if necessary. Be gone a week. Love."

"Isn't that perfectly heartless of him," moaned Mrs. Peyson, "to go away at a time like this!"

"Of course, mama, he didn't know," said Dorothy.

"But he could have come by," she sobbed.

"Maybe he had to catch a certain train."

"Well, good day," Shannon said again, and turned to go.

"I'll let you out." Miles led the way down the stair to the street door. As he turned back he saw Dorothy descending the stairs, and he stepped back into a little alcove formed by a bend in the staircase, thus screening himself from her view.

She ran down as if in feverish haste. A small brown hat was pulled far down on her dark hair, and a thick veil acted as a sort of disguise. For a second she hesitated in the doorway, then darted outside, closing the door noiselessly behind her.

There was a motor-cap on a hat-rack just behind Miles. He put it on, with no regard for its ownership, and after a moment followed Dorothy out of the house.

Contrary to her telephone message to Smith, Dorothy turned in the opposite direction from the park, and was hurrying toward Park Avenue. Miles followed her at a discreet distance. At Park Avenue she turned down-town and walked for about four blocks. Once she hesitated, and he dodged into Eighty-Ninth Street, in case she should retrace her steps.

Her hesitancy, however, was but for the moment. Reaching Eighty-First Street, she turned and walked toward the park, crossing quickly to the entrance of the Metropolitan Art Gallery. Without a backward glance she ran up the stairs.

Miles stood at the corner of the street, and watched her greet Smith, her riding-master. He saw they were in most earnest conversation.

Even under the stress of the moment Miles could not but notice the superb physique of the man; his erect carriage, square shoulders, and well-poised head standing out in noticeable contrast with the many passers-by. The riding clothes he wore accentuated the curves of his almost perfectly molded limbs, and a smile of appreciation for Dorothy's taste in regard to

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physical beauty drew Miles's thin lips away from his teeth.

That Smith was furiously angry he could tell by his gesticulations. Presently Dorothy began to cry. She left the riding-master and once again crossed the avenue, and went immediately into a cross-town street and disappeared.

Smith stood where Dorothy had left him. Miles sprinted across the street and up the steps of the Art Gallery with an agility which would have astonished his employer. He almost collided with Smith, who muttered a smothered oath and flung away a freshly lighted cigarette. His cold, gray eyes surveyed the small, insignificant figure before him; then he strode off, and, mounting an approaching bus, disappeared from view.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHO WAS THAT WOMAN?

AFTER leaving Martha's apartment, Jimmie jumped into his roadster and drove quickly through the park. The bracing night air partially cooled the fever that laid hold on him, but his brain was befogged—in a daze. He could not collect his thoughts. A sort of terror seemed to paralyze his mind and deprive it of action.

On reaching the garage where he kept his machine, he hesitated, swung about, then drove up-town, beyond Yonkers, and into the Pelham Road. For a couple of hours he rode, scarcely noticing time or place. The throb of the engine under him, the whir of the motor, filled his consciousness, seeming to sing emeralds and diamonds.

Try as he would, it was impossible to get the peculiar necklace Martha had worn out of his mind. Like a great specter in the road it appeared before him. It hung on the wind-shield, it gleamed on the motor-lamps; it twined itself around the steering-wheel, until he was almost tempted to go back to the girl he loved and accuse her of being the dead woman or her twin!

Then he laughed at the stupidity of the notion. She could not be the one, and if she were the other—well, what if she were?

It was almost four o'clock when he drove back slowly, as though the car were as tired as he. The morning was breaking clear and cold. A calm settled upon him. He flung himself in bed, determined to sleep, and outraged nature came to his aid.

It was around noon when Shannon and Garry left the Peyson house and walked over to Fifth Avenue together. Many shoppers were hurrying from one fashionable store to another.

"I'll take a bus down-town," said Shannon, "and you hang on to that Mme. Sanchez. She hasn't put that alibi over with me."

"Nor me," replied Garry. "There's something crooked about that bird, or—"

"Seems to me I've seen her face somewhere," ruminated Shannon, "and it wasn't in no ice-cream parlor."

The day was beautiful, and they continued to walk down the avenue together, going over in detail all the evidence in the jewel robbery and especially the imprint of Mme. Sanchez's hand.

"Well, here's where I stop," said Garry, pausing before a window wherein were displayed several dummy heads, advertising the latest styles of hairdressing. The window was similar to any belonging to the usual beauty parlors. Jeweled ornaments, bottles of pomade, perfumes, and brilliantine were on display besides switches, puffs, and curls of various shades of false hair. Wax heads with well-coifed wigs smiled through the glass at the passer-by.

While they stood looking in the window a girl's hand was thrust through the silver gray velvet curtains which acted as a background for the window display. The girl's figure followed as she reached for a bunch of yellow curls. She was clothed in a neat, black dress and white apron; her yellow, obviously bleached hair was faultlessly marcelled and done in the prevailing mode; her sharp, rather shrewd face was beautifully enameled. Shannon whistled under his breath.

"The Reilly girl," he muttered, "or I'll eat my shirt! Is this Sanchez's place?" He looked up, but the owner of the shop did not advertise in that way. A large gold

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letter " S " ornamented the fringed window draperies and door panels. He turned his eyes again to the window and met those of the girl.

For a moment they wavered and fell, then they were lifted. She smiled, a bright, inviting smile, showing a row of strong, even, white teeth. He smiled in return, and she gave him a long, lingering glance as she turned from the window. Shannon hesitated a moment, undecided.

" What's the idea?" Garry asked.

Shannon's keen gray eyes narrowed.

" What's the dope?" said Garry, evidently noticing his expression.

" The Reilly girl ain't in that shop for no good! The Sanchez woman put up a good story, and her beauty parlor looks respectable enough; but with as slick a confidence worker as the Reilly girl employed in her shop, there's something rotten!"

" Got anything on the Reilly girl now?" Garry asked.

" No, worse luck; she served her turn like a good little girl, but she's a bad penny, and there's something on tap wherever she is. And if she's working as a manicure girl, she's either putting it over on the Sanchez woman or working with her."

" But her game is blackmail, not robbery, if I remember," mused Garry.

" Thieves sometimes change their trades, the same as honest people," said Shannon. He flung aside his cigar, looked at his bronzed, stubby hands, and laughed. " Guess I'll go in and have my nails manicured. Wouldn't hurt me to be prettied up a bit. See you later."

" I get you," said Garry as he moved away.

Shannon entered the gray-and-gold room with its show-cases on one side and three little gray ivory tables on the other. His feelings were those of the proverbial bull in a china-shop. His large, ungainly shoes sank incongruously into the soft velvet of the gray carpet. He seemed to tower above the little glass cases filled with all the toilet perquisites affected by beautiful women and dandified men.

His air of intense masculinity contrasted forcibly with the artificial atmosphere of the place, the daintiness of it, the subtle perfume which permeated it. Its proprietress was nowhere to be seen, nor was the girl whose presence in the shop had brought him in. A dark girl, also dressed in a black gown and apron, advanced toward him. He looked quickly about him, striving to pierce the gray velvet curtains which divided the shop; then he assumed an awkward, stammering manner usually associated with a man from the country.

" What can I do for you?" said the girl, smiling.

He looked at his hands, extending them toward her.

" Oh, I see," she said. " A manicure. Will you sit down, please?" She motioned to one of the little ivory tables, and he seated himself clumsily. She vanished behind the curtains. When she appeared again she was followed by the bleached blonde whom Shannon had mentally dubbed " the Reilly girl."

That young person smiled ingratiatingly upon him as though she fancied his presence in the shop was due to her attractiveness; but she passed him and stepped behind the show-case, where she appeared to be searching for some particular toilet article.

Shannon heroically endured all the tortures of filing and soaking and polishing, now and then glancing furtively at the blond girl as she darted in and out of the shop, fluttering about in a manner which would lead one to believe she was desirous of attracting his attention.

As she rose to go she leaned across the cash-register toward him.

" Come again, please," she said softly.

He almost collided with a big, handsome chap who entered as he was leaving. There was something so striking about the man's proportions and his unusual blond coloring that Shannon turned for a second look at him.

" Good morning," said the Reilly girl to the newcomer. " Have a seat. I'll be with you in a minute."

" He's nuts about her," whispered the dark girl who had served Shannon as she went with him to the door. " He has a riding academy for the swells, but can't see nobody but Amy."

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"Bleached hussy!" Shannon said mentally as he went out. "I wonder if she is on to me and trying to disarm me, or if she's playing me for a mouse. And what's she workin' the riding-master for?"

He hopped a bus and went on down to Bleecker Street, visiting all the pawn-shops owned by suspicious characters where stolen goods might be received; also some loan-brokers, honest enough, but to whom the thief or thieves might have gone to dispose of the jewels.

Late that afternoon Jimmie awakened. Recollecting that he had a dinner engagement with Martha, he jumped up and, after a cold shower, proceeded leisurely to dress, the while he held his thoughts in abeyance. He could not solve the mystery; he would not try, would not think about it, even. There was probably some very simple explanation which Martha could and would willingly give. This satisfying view of the matter sent his naturally light spirits soaring instantly.

On the street he bought a paper, and at once proceeded to Martha's apartment. He was told by the maid that her mistress was not yet dressed, but would be out in a few minutes. He settled back comfortably in a huge upholstered chair, and, drawing out the paper, proceeded to read it.

Head-lines on the front page startled him out of his complacency. He read them twice, horror in his eyes; for there in bold, black letters was an announcement of the Peyson robbery at No. 53 East Ninetieth Street. Following was a complete description of the stolen jewels, the safe from which they had been taken, and the indefinite time given for the act itself.

The burglars had boldly torn off the boarding over the window and smashed the glass; then, as if to have a little private joke on the owners, they had left a sum of money on the kitchen table, evidently to pay for the damage, and had at once proceeded to relieve the house of thousands of dollars' worth of diamonds. Nothing else had been touched. Plate, pictures, everything else was untouched.

As the safe had been installed only the day before the departure of the family for the mountains, and as it was absolutely hidden by a clever panel and tapestries, and its existence unknown to any but the workmen who had installed it and the immediate family, the police were of the opinion that information had been given from the inside.

The policeman who had been on that beat all summer was away on a vacation, but he had been communicated with, and it was believed that he could give valuable information.

Jimmie read every word, then lifted his head like a man who had been mortally wounded and looks for the last time on a world he has loved.

"My God!" he whispered.

Martha, entering that moment, stopped suddenly at sight of him.

"Jimmie! What is it?" she cried.

He looked at her, but saw her not. His mind's eye stared at her counterpart lying on the bed in the Peysons' home, her red hair staining the white counterpane with its glory; he saw himself in the darkened room, the curtain blowing against his face from the mysterious draft. Clutching the newspaper in his hand, he shuddered perceptibly.

"What is it, Jimmie?" she repeated in deep concern.

Moistening his lips with his tongue, he endeavored to speak naturally; instead, his voice was strained, high-pitched:

"Read that!" He handed her the paper, his finger marking the article.

Her face grew pale as she read. Leaning forward in his chair, Jimmie gripped the arms of it tightly. He had not even risen when she entered the room.

Directly she let the paper slip to the floor, and her great gray-green eyes met his. There was silent agony in them. For a second neither spoke. She broke the silence.

"The Peysons. My stepfather owns the house next to theirs. I've seen them. The daughter is very pretty. It's really too bad."

"It's hellish!" Jimmie cried, springing to his feet. "It's damnable! That's what it is!"

"Why, Jimmie!" In her effort to appear natural her voice sounded hysterical.

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"Listen," he said tensely. "It was I who smashed that window, I who left that money on the kitchen table to pay for the damage."

"Oh, Jimmie!" Martha retreated a step as though she feared what he would say next.

"We made a bet," he went on rapidly. "Morelle, Scovill, and I—no, I made it—that I could enter one of those houses at night, stay the night, and no one the wiser. We'd been drinking, or we wouldn't have done the crazy thing! I used a jimmy and a flash, like any house-breaker; climbed in the kitchen window—"

"Jimmie!" Again she cried out, and there was more than amazement in her voice; it was terror.

"I went up-stairs," Jimmie continued, still taking no notice of her interruptions. "I staggered against the bed, touched something cold. I switched on the lights, and there on the bed was a dead woman!"

"O-o-oh!" Martha put her hands over her face shudderingly.

Jimmie took a step toward her. His eyes were hard, his face set.

"She was—beautiful—with red hair! She wore a string of pearls on which was a pendant of emeralds and diamonds exactly like the one you wore last night."

There was accusation, pleading in his tone, as though he knew and yet hoped she would deny what his words implied.

Instead, she gave a sob, and flung herself face downward on a big divan.

He followed her slowly, haltingly, like a man who has had a stroke that has deprived him of the free use of his legs.

"I went out for a cop," the man droned as though bound to get it all out. "When we got back, the—woman was gone! I was laughed at. The—house—was—robbed—that night. And I've got to tell all I know!"

"Oh, no! No, no!" Martha sprang up, wringing her hands. Her eyes were wild. She looked about the room in a curious, hunted way, as though she sought a place to hide. "You mustn't tell! You mustn't!"

"Martha"—Jimmie's voice was hard—"what do you know about that robbery?"

"Nothing!" she cried in an agony of terror. "Oh, nothing! I swear it. This"—she pointed to the paper—"is the first I knew of it!"

"Then, what about that woman who looked exactly like you, and who wore the pendant you had on last night?"

"Oh, don't ask me," pleaded Martha. "Please don't ask me."

"The police will ask you," he replied coldly.

"The police!" she screamed. "Do you mean that you intend to turn me over to the police? Bring notoriety and shame on me?"

"Of course not!" Jimmie replied indignantly. "But I've got to tell about my own escapade. The policeman who went with me into the house will tell about the woman I claimed to have seen. He will remember my description of her.

"I was nettled because they laughed at me, and insisted on giving a detailed description of the woman, dwelling at length upon the string of matched pearls with its curious old pendant and the woman's vivid hair.

"The policeman will tell this. You wore the pearls and pendant last night. It was remarked by the company. The combination of your hair and that necklace is too unusual a combination to escape the—police."

He spoke dully, like one on whom death has been pronounced, and who directs the disposition of his effects as though his mind were employed with the all-important subject of the beyond.

Martha sat down suddenly. Her eyes were wide and dry, and she shivered miserably. Her knees shook, and she clasped and unclasped her hands.

He slumped down into a chair and stared at the carpet. Directly her restless hands paused. The fingers of her right hand were on the single beautiful ring on her left. She looked down at it, then drew it off slowly, and held it out to him.

He stared up.

"Oh, Martha, honey, I—"

She laid the ring on the arm of his chair, and without a word went out of the room. He stood still, staring at the closed door

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between them, and then went quickly to it.

"Martha, please let me speak to you," he begged through the closed door.

But there was no answer. He stood there for a few minutes longer, knocking, pleading for a word with her; then went out, leaving the ring on the arm of the chair.

Martha stood in the center of her bedroom until she heard Jimmie close the door as he went out, the elevator rise and descend. Crossing to the telephone on her desk, she called a number. Her voice was hard, metallic.

"Hello! Give me Plaza 945-67. Yes? Hurry!" She tapped the carpet with her foot, and a deep furrow marred the beauty of her forehead. "Hello! Plaza 945—Hello! Is M. Doré there? At dinner? Call him, please; it's important; I wish to speak to him. Who? His stepdaughter. Hurry!"

Nervously she pulled at a lock of her vivid hair, which fell across her cheek. She twisted and untwisted it until she heard her stepfather's voice on the other end of the line.

"Hello! Papa Rand? Listen; come over right away! I've got to see you! Don't wait for your machine—take a taxi!"

She hung up the receiver, then with a gesture of utter despair flung herself on the divan by the window, and, digging her head in the pillows, sobbed as though her heart would break.

CHAPTER IX.

FRIENDS.

RAND DORÉ, being a brilliant conversationalist, fairly shone over the dinner-table. When Martha called him on the phone just after returning Jimmie's ring, Doré excused himself from a distinguished-looking man in his early fifties who was dining with him.

"I'll be gone only a moment," he said when his secretary quietly announced that Miss Doré was on the phone and would like to speak with her stepfather.

That Doré was a man of means was evident. The handsome oriental rugs and runners in the halls and on the stairway, the pictures and rare vases, proclaimed a total indifference to cost; also indicating taste and culture. No one seemed to know where the man came from or why he had taken No. 51 and furnished it so lavishly.

He appeared to have no business, going and coming at will. He entertained a guest or two on rare occasions; seldom appeared in society, and then only at public functions with his stepdaughter. But wherever he went, he compelled attention and admiration. His splendid carriage and dignified appearance, his facile mind and wide culture, won him instant notice in any company.

With quick, catlike tread he followed the secretary into his study, a spacious room with books reaching to the ceilings on all sides, and some fine bronzes and steel engravings.

For a moment, after promising Martha that he would come to her as soon as his guest was gone, Doré sat at the phone as though lost in thought; then with a little whimsical smile went back to his guest.

If the Frenchman was in any way disturbed by his stepdaughter's excited message, he gave no sign of it; but talked on as though he had not a thought in the world outside the pleasure of the moment.

Dinner over, the distinguished stranger was silent for some minutes.

"Are you sure you can trust her?" asked Mr. Stonewall, evidently taking up some conversation where they had left off earlier in the evening.

"You can never be sure of a woman," said Doré with a shrug. "There is no rule or logic that may be safely applied to them. But I believe we can trust her. There's no other way that I can see but to make her do it. Miles absolutely can't."

"No, I suppose not." The other spoke meditatively.

Doré flicked the ash from his cigarette. "Burk says Freeman gave him money to keep quiet."

"Who is Burk?"

"The policeman who was on the beat that night. He made light of the whole matter to those three young fools, and is

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convinced that Freeman didn't follow it up. I'm not so sure."

"You say Burk made no report?"

"None. I got hold of him at once. In fact, I notified him beforehand. He was two blocks away when those young fools found him and made him go back with them."

"How about Smith?" asked Stonewall, rising.

"Very much upset." Doré rose also.

"But why should he be if—"

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders. They went into the hall, and Doré helped his guest into a light overcoat.

"Well, keep me posted," said Stonewall, moving toward the door.

"Yes; I'll wire you to-morrow." Doré did not urge the man to linger.

"That reminds me, I've misplaced my code," said the stranger. "Better not use it again. It may have been stolen. If you succeed, just wire S. S."

"Very well; and I'll have my secretary fix up a new code. He's very good at it."

"If Miles gave you the right tip, then somebody had been in the night before you."

Doré stopped suddenly, as if struck by a sudden thought; his eyes glittered.

They talked together for a few minutes in short sentences, then Doré opened the door for his guest.

Mme. Sanchez was standing in the shadow, flattened against the wall. She almost jumped inside. A dark figure that had followed her all the way up the street dropped back out of the glare caused by the open door.

"I haf been follow!" she said excitedly. "The police they are so naive. Oh, I lead them one merry chase. I enjoy it."

She laughed vindictively, and followed the secretary into the large study, while Doré stopped a few minutes longer with his guest.

The secretary busied himself with the various papers scattered over Doré's desk, and Mme. Sanchez tapped her foot impatiently or walked about, looking at the many books. She was clearly very nervous, very excited.

After a while Doré came in. He was a little flushed, but otherwise as suave and nonchalant as usual.

The secretary went out, and the two talked long and earnestly. After a while the woman jumped up excitedly.

"I won't do it!" she cried. "I won't do your dirty work. Suppose I get caught. The stupid police they suspect me now and watch. A man haf follow me here."

"You shouldn't have been so careless as to leave the print of your hand on that safe," smiled Doré.

There was a light tap on the door.

"Come in," called Doré; and Abner Miles entered. Mme. Sanchez showed no surprise at seeing him, or at his changed appearance. He was straight, alert, and dominant. He looked inquiringly at her and Doré.

Doré looked interrogatively at Miles, who seemed to understand his unspoken question.

"No," he answered. "I'm positive we'll find what we want in Dorothy's room. And I can't get in there for long enough at a time."

"Mme. Peyson, I hate her!" cried Mme. Sanchez. "But she pay me well. I will not take so much a chance."

"Burk was in No. 53 the night of the —er—robbery," said Doré, watching the woman. "Where was Marie?"

Madame rose, appearing greatly perturbed. "You lie! How you know?"

"I saw him there." Doré watched her, an odd gleam in his eyes. "And as you know, somebody was there ahead of me. Did you tell Marie about the jewels?"

"Ah!" screamed Mme. Sanchez. "I'll do what you wish. I'll do it!" she cried. "But don't drive me too far!"

She grew suddenly sullen, and after some instructions from the men went out, leaving Doré to hurry into his coat.

"I must run over to Martha's," he said to Miles. "She phoned me two hours ago. She seemed rather upset—probably read the papers. Women are always finding things to have hysterics over."

"Sanchez knows the lay of the house," said Miles, "and can easily find business in Dorothy's room. I believe we can trust her."

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"Yes," said Doré, "we've got her scared. That was just a guess, of course, about her telling Marie."

"Burk will tell her why he was there as soon as he gets back. He's expected to-night."

"Still she is afraid about Marie," smiled Doré.

They separated in the hall, Doré going out the front door and Miles the back.

Garry meantime had hovered about the Sanchez shop. Shortly after the papers were out announcing the Peyson robbery, the Reilly girl came out and hurried across the street to a drug-store. Following, he saw her enter a public booth.

"That's funny," he muttered. "They'd oughter have telephone service in that beauty shop."

He went into the booth next her, and made a note of the number she called and of a date she made. He let her get out of the drug-store, then caught the same bus, she going up to the top of it, he staying down-stairs. She entered a café in the Eighties, and had a drink with a tall man whose face Garry had some difficulty in seeing, owing to the careful selection of their table.

She did not linger, but after talking earnestly with the man for a very few minutes got up and went out. She hurried back to the shop, and almost directly came out again, carrying a small package.

Garry trailed her again, using the same bus, to a particularly squalid, poverty-stricken street. Regardless of the autumn day, the heat in the lower portion of the city was intense. Fire-escape, street corner, door-steps, and plots of grass over the subway were used as resting-places by the inhabitants of the rambling, fire-trap tenement-houses.

Half-naked children crawled under and around the push carts which littered the streets. Women hung over the fire-escapes, or out of the windows, striving to get a bit of fresh air, a little relief from the sultry, sickening heat which was crushing all life and vitality out of them.

The air was filled with the odor of garlic-cooked cabbage and decaying fruit, and everywhere were discordant sounds, quarrelsome women, bickering with street venders, hand-organs playing, merchants calling their wares, children crying from discomfort. The whole place seemed to be screaming out defiance to nature.

Through the confusion, the pandemonium of sounds, came the huge double-decked bus. Shrieks of derision greeted its appearance. Jeers at the well-dressed sight-seers escaped dozens of throats as the lumbering vehicle sped along its hazardous course.

The street was one upon which the big motor-car did not have the right of way. The one used for its course being torn up and impassable, the driver had risked turning into this one. Instead of moving out of the way, the children swarmed about it, the passengers giving little cries of terror for fear that the big wheels would crush one of them. The owners of the push-carts did not give an inch, but stared insolently as the green machine almost brushed against their stores.

Slowly, carefully the driver swung into the street. The din was terrific. Sleepy, tired women moved a little to one side of the street, taking their camp-stools with them, and allowed the car to pass. One old Italian leaned over his vegetable-stand and muttered curses at the mammoth intruder which compelled him to move his wares.

Suddenly in the midst of the clamor and the derisive cries, the great car swerved a bit too much to one side; there was a shriek, cries of "Get him!" screams of anger. A push-cart had been overturned and its contents scattered in the street.

Here the Reilly girl got out and, without once looking back, hurried through an alley to another street similar to the one she had just left. She entered a side door of a saloon; Garry went in by the front door, and saw her sit at a little table. Directly a big, burly man entered and went directly to her table. His small, ratlike eyes, low, sloping forehead, and protruding jaw marked him as a congenital criminal.

"Dago Joe!" mused Garry. "Slicker'n greased lightning."

Drinks were ordered, for which the girl

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paid each time. Before leaving, she gave a little package to Dago Joe, who took it sullenly as he talked. She seemed to be trying to conciliate him.

CHAPTER X.

THE CATSPAW.

MR. PEYSON, deep in the mysteries of a card game, flying toward Chicago, was entirely unaware of the turmoil in his household where Mrs. Peyson went from one hysterical fit into another.

"It's just like your father's heartlessness," she cried, "not to be here when he's needed. And we can't even wire him till to-morrow."

"I can call up the office, find out what road he used, and wire him on board the train," said Miles, who was never far from Dorothy.

"Well, then, do it, stupid!" shouted Mrs. Peyson. "Why haven't you done it before, I'd like to know! You knew I was about crazy, and you wait for me to think of everything. Dorothy, get some brandy —I'm going to faint again."

"Oh, for goodness' sake, mama!" cried Dorothy, ringing for a maid, while Miles went to send the telegram to Mr. Peyson.

If that little man's wife could have seen his face upon receipt of the wire she would have been greatly astonished. In his faded eyes was a positive and decided twinkle. He studied the scrap of yellow paper as though he found in it a deep and much-longed-for satisfaction. The wire sent in reply said:

> Good enough for you. You'll take my advice next time. Keep it from police till I get back. Important. JOHN.

Upon receipt of this heartless communication Mrs. Peyson became so violently ill that a physician had to be called in to administer a narcotic.

Jimmie drove across Fifty-Ninth Street. As he turned up Fifth Avenue he was hailed by Morelle and Scovill coming out of the club.

"We've been telephoning all over the city for you!" cried Morelle. "Sent a special messenger over to your quarters."

Jimmie stopped the car, and the two men climbed in without invitation. Morelle, being the smaller, sat in the bucket seat.

"Have you seen the evening papers?" Scovill asked as they sped up the avenue.

"I've seen them," responded Jimmie grimly.

"Well," said Morelle, "we'll have to go at once to Peyson's and tell them the whole story of the broken window and—"

"I'm against it!" broke in Scovill excitedly. "I say keep mum—keep out of it. We didn't get the jewels. What good can it do to get ourselves into all kinds of a mess for—"

"I agree with Elmer," interrupted Jimmie. "Policeman Burk knows I was in that house and—"

"As to that," the lawyer said, "it would cost him his job to admit that he failed to report so important a matter."

"That's right," put in the broker. "He daren't tell, and I don't see any sense in mixing up in it."

"The paper says he is on his way to New York with important information," said Jimmie. "He probably means to tell."

"That is very likely newspaper talk," said Morelle. "Or the police are trying to scare somebody. Small danger of his telling unless he has to; but I think our best bet is to beat him to it before he has to. There's not much danger of the Peysons thinking us the thieves, and it may be that there won't even be any need of our names appearing."

"Then why say anything about it?" protested Scovill, still unconvinced. "I don't see the sense of it."

"Because, acknowledged, our escapade is just that—kept secret, it becomes suspicious. Besides, what we have to tell may lead to the capture of the thieves."

Upon this, Jimmie suddenly took sides with Scovill, arguing that it might lead to a great deal of unpleasantness without achieving any good. In the end, however, the lawyer won the argument.

"Oh, by the way," said Jimmie as they were going up the Peyson steps, "there's

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no need to speak of the dead woman I thought I saw."

"You *thought* you saw!" exclaimed Morelle, ringing the bell. "Well, this is the first time you've shown any doubt on the subject. Why, man, that's the main thing—it may lead to the discovery of—"

The big door swung open, and a stately butler was staring suspiciously at them. Upon receiving their names, he showed his familiarity with their position by admitting them at once.

Dorothy came down, pale and rather bored-looking, but brightened at sight of the visitors.

Jimmie introduced his friends, and asked to see Mrs. Peyson.

"She's up-stairs, lying down," replied Dorothy. "She's been terribly upset all day, and if you could wait until to-morrow—"

"We wouldn't have intruded," said Morelle, who, in spite of his perturbation, could not keep his admiration out of his eyes, "had it not been of the utmost importance. We have something to communicate that may have a bearing on the robbery."

"Then you'd better come up to mother's boudoir," replied Dorothy as though the whole thing were a bore and a nuisance.

She led the way toward the stairs. Miles, seeming to come in without knowing that there were guests, hovered apologetically in the drawing-room door.

Mrs. Peyson knew the young men by name, and was cordial, though impressively sad in her greeting. As briefly as possible Jimmie told her about the bet, the fact that they were drinking, explained the smashed window, and the money that had been found on the table.

"It was an idiotic thing to do," he ended, "and of course if we hadn't been drinking—"

"Don't forget the red-haired woman," broke in Scovill.

Whereupon Jimmie, with considerable hesitation, told of the dead woman he had seen on the bed.

Mrs. Peyson was threatened with a faint, but Dorothy appeared most unfeelingly interested in the story.

"And she wore a string of perfectly matched pearls," put in Scovill, once having consented, now eager to leave nothing untold.

"Pearls?" echoed Dorothy.

"And wasn't there some kind of a curious pendant of emeralds and—"

He stopped short, stared at Jimmie. Morelle, who had been all eyes for Dorothy, was attracted by Scovill's sudden pause, and was astonished by the look on his face.

"Pearls with a pendant of emeralds and what?" questioned Dorothy.

Now it was Morelle's turn to stare. Jimmie's eyes dropped and refused to meet theirs.

"And diamonds," he finished. "But what I—we are most interested in is our forgiveness for an unpardonable intrusion." He looked at Mrs. Peyson.

That lady, seeing before her three distinctly eligible young men, and having an erratic and expensive daughter, smiled beamingly. Of course, they were forgiven. Young folks would be young folks, and play pranks. She had been young once herself and full of pranks.

Dorothy smiled a little at this, and added to her mother's assurances of good will. At the same time she expressed a hope that their strangely begun acquaintance might not end where it had begun. She looked at Elmer, whose eyes had scarcely left her pretty, petulant face from the moment he looked at her.

"You are most kind," he stammered, "and if we—I might call to-morrow to inquire after your mother's health—"

"Do!" Dorothy responded with a charming smile. Whatever her feelings for the riding-master, certain it is that she did not scorn a flirtation with this handsome young lawyer.

With repeated apologies and amid much cordiality the young men took their leave.

As Dorothy's hand touched the knob of her mother's door to let their guests out, there was a gentle knock, and the next moment Abner Miles was disclosed, apologetic and distressed.

"I just came to say, Miss Dorothy, that the Chow and the Pekingese have come to-

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gether at last, and I'm afraid they will chew each other up."

With a cry of distress Dorothy ran down to the rescue of her pets, leaving Miles to show the visitors out.

Jimmie did not go home after dropping his friends at the club, but turned toward the Pelham Road. He tried to marshal his thoughts, to bring them to some sort of order, but could not. All that jumped up without form or meaning were a dead woman with red hair, a pearl necklace with a curious pendant, and Martha, and a beautiful solitaire ring lying on the arm of a big chair.

Round and round his thoughts went with these until he saw but one thing—the ring lying there unnoticed, uncared for. Suddenly he wanted to go get it and put it—where? Oh, yes, on a beautiful finger of her marvelous hand. Then he seemed conscious only of one thing.

The thought obsessed him, tortured him until he swung his car around and was hurrying back toward Central Park West. She was angry at him. He had offended her—hurt her. He had to make it right. He could not let a night pass without making it up with her.

A traffic policeman held him up, and he was compelled to wait until a string of automobiles, trucks, and street-cars passed. Inwardly he fumed and stormed. A fear that she had left the house and would not return until late caused a sinking in his heart. She was the most desirable, the only worth-while thing in the world.

Entering the lobby, he noticed by the indicator that the elevator was on the top floor, so he sprinted up the stairs, not caring to wait for its descent. Martha's apartment was on the second floor. As he reached the landing he saw her foyer door pushed open, then slightly closed again, leaving it ajar.

Something made him hesitate before ringing. He stepped into the shadow of the elevator exactly opposite. Some one was about to leave the apartment, for again the door swung partially open, and he heard voices—Martha's and that of the man he so cordially disliked, Rand Doré.

Even in this short space of time she had seemed to forget Jimmie and was chatting with this mysterious stepfather of hers.

Doré's voice was pitched very low. Jimmie could not hear what he said, only a mumble of words reached his ears, then he heard Martha cry out in a strange, unnatural voice that made him lean forward to catch every word.

He knew it was Martha speaking; but in a tone unrecognizable.

"You lied to me!" she cried. "You've used me as a catspaw! That's it, a catspaw! Where are they? What have you done with them?"

Jimmie almost stumbled into the apartment opposite trying to keep his equilibrium.

The cobwebs all seemed brushed away in a most terrible, appalling manner, and he marshaled the facts. Martha's startling resemblance to the dead woman, the unusual necklace they had both worn. They were one and the same! Martha was the girl he had seen in No. 53!

And yet that girl had been dead, and Martha lived! And he loved her!

"Oh, God!" he moaned, perspiration starting out on his forehead. Automatically he rang the elevator bell. He could not see her now; he must think, fathom a mystery which with every disclosure grew deeper. When the elevator stopped he entered and was carried to the floor below.

"You've used me as a catspaw—that's it, a catspaw!" kept ringing in his ears as he turned his car homeward.

After pacing the floor nearly all night, Jimmie threw himself across the bed without removing his clothes. He was awakened by a pounding on his door.

"Get up; it's ten o'clock," came Scovill's voice from the outside.

Startled out of a sound sleep, Jimmie jumped up before he was fully awake and admitted Scovill, pale for perhaps the first time in his life. The broker was waving a newspaper at him.

"My God!" he exclaimed, dropping his fat bulk on the nearest chair.

"What's the matter?" cried Jimmie, closing the door.

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"The policeman—Burk—he was shot last night on his way from the Pennsylvania Station to police headquarters!"

"Shot!" repeated Jimmie stupidly.

"He's in the hospital, unconscious," Scovill continued. "They have almost no hope of his recovery. It was known that he had important information to give regarding the robbery."

"Do the police know who—did it?" asked Jimmie dazedly.

"They know it was a woman!"

"A woman?"

"Yes. They found a woman's veil clutched in his hands. He evidently turned as she shot him, ran after her, and snatched the veil before falling. Nobody saw it."

Jimmie slumped down on a chair.

"There's more to this, George, than we—thought!"

"Guess so. Elmer says we've let ourselves in for a hell of a mess. If we hadn't told, nobody ever could have found out we were mixed up in it."

CHAPTER XI.

MARTHA AND DOROTHY MEET.

"MR. AND MISS DORÉ!" announced the butler.

Jimmie Freeman, talking abstractedly to a group of débutants, turned as a little buzz went over the smart folk at Mrs. Van Cleve's reception, two days after the return of the Peysons from the Adirondacks, and Jimmie's trouble with the girl he loved.

Elizabeth Van Cleve's receptions, dinners, and dances were always events, but this one bade fair to be of more than usual importance. She had conceived the idea of giving a vaudeville entertainment later in the evening, for which she intended to charge admission and donate the proceeds to the tobacco-fund for the soldiers.

"Not that I approve of the tobacco at all," she said, "for I think it a dirty, pernicious habit; but one must do something besides knit."

Martha Doré had consented to dance for her, and was to be the star of the evening. While Mrs. Van Cleve was well aware that Martha had been taken up by the best people, still she had never flung her doors open to the dancer, and had invited her only because she desired her services.

Mrs. Van Cleve had had stage aspirations herself years before, so it was not on account of the girl's profession that she had snubbed her; but probably because Martha was so much more attractive than her own stupid, quite plain Mary Louise, whom she had intended that Jimmie Freeman should marry.

Jimmie had paid a little attention to Mary Louise; about the same amount that he did most débutantes, thus causing many young hearts to flutter, for Jimmie was more attractive than most eligibles; but this little attention Mary Louise Van Cleve, or her mother, had chosen to interpret as meaning something more serious; and when Martha had appeared upon the horizon and Jimmie's marked attentions to her had become known, Mrs. Van Cleve had been considerably ruffled. However, wishing this reception to be the event of the season, she had tossed aside personal feelings and invited the dancer.

The rooms were stifling; the odor of crushed flowers, and many perfumes, almost intoxicated one. Beautiful women in marvelous evening creations rubbed shoulders with uniformed officers. Young men in full-dress explained to lisping buds why they were not slackers and just merely exempt. Everything was war—war—war!

Then Martha was announced. Mrs. Van Cleve advanced toward her with the intention, no doubt, of impressing upon the girl her own superiority; but Martha's entrance had created a sensation. Her stepfather's decidedly foreign appearance always singled him out in a crowd; while her own unusual beauty made her noticeable.

She wore a vivid green gown that only a red-haired woman would dare affect. Masses and masses of green tulle enveloped her like a cloud, making her white skin seem whiter, her red hair redder.

Instead of Mrs. Van Cleve impressing Martha, Martha impressed Mrs. Van Cleve. Jimmie turned very pale when he saw her, and lost the thread of his conversation. Her eyes met his, a faint smile curved her lips, and she bowed her head as she passed him.

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"Is it true you are engaged?" cried one of the girls in a slightly awed voice.

"Beg pardon?" said Jimmie.

"Oh, I think she is adorable!" said another. "Quite the prettiest girl I ever saw!"

Mary Louise Van Cleve was among the group. Her thin, pale face was turned upward. She awaited Jimmie's reply to the question eagerly. He, however, did not seem inclined to answer. Seeing Scovill across the room, he hastily excused himself and left the admiring group of girls to themselves.

"I wonder if it's true that they are engaged?" said the first little girl who had spoken. A birdlike creature she was, with mouse-colored hair and eyes, and a quaint mousy way of dressing. This season's bud, she had not yet grown blasé and world-weary, and everything pertaining to love and lovers was interesting.

"I think it would be just wonderful if they were! He's so handsome, and she's so beautiful! My, don't you adore red hair?"

"I detest it," said Miss Van Cleve with a trifle too much feeling.

"You had designs on Jimmie yourself, didn't you, Mary Louise?" sweetly remarked a small, fair girl.

"No more than I have on any other eligible man," replied Mary Louise with astonishing frankness, "and no more than the rest of you have."

"Gracious!" exclaimed the little mouse girl. "Oh, hello, Dorothy!" She interrupted herself to greet Dorothy with a bear-like hug. "Gracious goodness, I'm glad to see you! You've been gone ages, haven't you? And you never even dropped me a card! And you were robbed while you were gone! How thrilling! Do tell me all about it? How did it happen, and when—"

Dorothy pulled away from the effusive little creature with a laugh.

"Lola, Lola, do take a breath; then ask me one question at a time."

"How wonderful you look!" Lola gasped again. "Perfectly gorgeous! I just said that Martha Doré was the beautifulest thing in the world, but declare to goodness, you're just as beautiful!"

Dorothy kissed her impulsively. "You dear little flatterer!"

She was looking unusually well. Her cheeks were flushed scarlet, which was most becoming to her piquant features. Her bright, brown eyes were brilliant. There was a feverish, artificial gaiety about her, giving the impression that she was a vivacious, joyous girl.

"Martha Doré?" she inquired, looking about her. "Where is she? I've never met her—for that matter, I've never seen her."

"Never seen her?" cried Lola. "Why, she's the rage."

"She became the vogue about the time I left town," said Dorothy. "Is that she over there with Mrs. Van Cleve?"

"Yes," said Lola. "Isn't she wonderful?" As Dorothy looked, Martha turned and caught her gaze—their eyes met. There was almost a challenge in the glance. A peculiar expression came across Martha's face. There was something in her stare that Dorothy resented. She shrugged her shoulders and answered her friend.

"She's pretty, but I shouldn't say wonderful. The way she stares is ill-bred, to say the least."

"She's still looking at you," said Lola.

Dorothy's face flushed angrily. "How stupid!" she said in an exasperated tone.

"Now tell me about the robbery," said Lola. "It must be perfectly thrilling to have such a thing happen in one's own home, just like a Conan Doyle story, or—"

"Thrilling?" said Dorothy, with an uplift of her perfectly penciled brows. "Perfectly horrid, you mean. Detectives, notoriety, loss—altogether terrible."

"Pardon me, Dorothy," came Mrs. Van Cleve's softly modulated voice. "I want you to know Miss Doré."

Dorothy turned quickly and faced her hostess and Martha. The latter smilingly extended her hand, and Dorothy took it. As she did so she noticed its beauty and delicacy; but even in the greeting the antagonism of the two girls could be felt.

"I've wanted to know you very much," Martha said, a ring of sincerity in her voice.

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"Yes?" Just an interrogation from the other.

Little Lola sidled in, as though wishing to compare them.

"I read of your robbery. It has interested me very much," Martha continued. "I'm so anxious to know if any clues have been found."

"It was mother who was robbed, not I," Dorothy said coldly. She looked curiously at the other girl, utterly at loss as to why she should begin such a conversation immediately on being introduced.

"Yes, yes, I know—but"—and Martha seemed to scrutinize her from head to foot—"I noticed the jewels you are wearing—pardon my rudeness—they—attracted me. I fancied—I hoped they were the ones which were stolen."

Instinctively Dorothy's hand went to her throat, encircled by a necklace of diamonds from which hung a pendant of sapphires, emeralds, and diamonds set in the formation of forget-me-nots. Her face flushed with embarrassment and anger. Evidently Martha noticed it, for she started to apologize.

"I'm not surprised at your remark," Dorothy said, breaking in upon her apologies, "for the description of the stolen jewels was given in all the papers—and they are rather singular settings. This happens to be merely the replica of the genuine that my mother had made before we went on our summer vacation."

"Marvelous — marvelous imitations!" murmured the other. The jewels seemed to have a curious attraction for her. She appeared loath to take her eyes from them. "I never saw imitations so wonderful before."

The subject seeming to annoy Dorothy, she dismissed it abruptly, and began to talk about Martha and her work, asking her a number of questions, caring no more for the replies than Martha did to give them. The situation became strained. They were striving for conversation, each desiring to break away, but unable to do so.

Lola's exclamations of "How lovely! Adorable! Too wonderful for words!" did little to keep the ball of conversation going.

The appearance of Jimmie helped matters considerably. Dorothy greeted him as a long-lost friend, which rather surprised him considering that he had met her but a few days before. He good-naturedly answered in kind, and Martha's eyes grew darker. A look of suffering passed over her white face—not unnoticed by him. He longed to put his arms around her, beg her for an explanation of all the damning, baffling evidence that was slowly but surely erecting a barrier between them.

But something held him back, kept him from taking her away from the little group; something bigger than pride, for pride alone could not have kept Jimmie Freeman from the woman he loved. Dorothy's voice seemed vague, far away to him—and he was conscious that his manner was almost rude.

In trying to appear natural he overdid it. He became almost hilarious in his manner. His attentions to Dorothy were so marked that before the evening was over more than one person was heard to comment upon it, and Scovill later drew him aside and told him not to make a fool of himself.

Martha's pain-ridden, hurt eyes haunted him. She made a supreme effort to hide the suffering she felt, but a really excellent actress can rarely act off the stage. It takes a woman without any talent for acting to do that successfully. Jimmie, with the cruelty which ever seems to be an element of great love, had done everything to lead Martha to believe he no longer cared for her, but for Dorothy.

"The show is about to begin," said some one.

"Do you do a stunt?" Jimmie asked Dorothy.

"Yes," she replied. "I'm going to sing, but I shall be quite a nonentity with a real professional occupying the same stage. She's beautiful, isn't she?"

"Yes," he answered, watching Martha's figure as she dodged in and out of the maze of exquisitely gowned women, the vivid green of her frock standing out in direct contrast to the more subdued or darker shades of the other's gowns, while she hurried toward the improvised dressing-rooms.

At one end of the ballroom Mrs. Van Cleve had had a small stage erected, and

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had hung some dark velvet curtains above it. Behind the stage were two dressing-rooms. With the exception of a violinist all the entertainers were women, so they shared the two rooms. Not that there was any dressing to be done, as Martha's act alone called for costuming; but each woman naturally felt called upon to add a little rouge or powder—more than she usually wore—and possibly desired to pat her hair into place, or to add a curl here and there.

Mrs. Van Cleve, not to be outdone as a stage-manager, had placed a tiny gold star on the door of one of the dressing-rooms. This room she had given to Martha, and later had also asked Dorothy to occupy it.

Before leaving Jimmie, Dorothy grew very confidential, leading the conversation to the topic of her mother's robbery.

Jimmie, feeling that he owed a great deal to her for his intrusion, patiently went over all the details of his share in the prank which took place on July 3. He was a bit startled, when in the midst of his narrative he glanced up and found Dorothy looking at him with an almost uncanny expression in her gold-brown eyes. There was a feverish excitement about her that he did not understand. She paid no heed to his self-interruption, but, placing a hot little hand on his, said in a husky voice:

"But this woman you saw on the bed—what was she like? Could you see her plainly? You don't seem to want to talk about her."

"Why, you see—" stammered Jimmie, "I—I was startled, and—"

"Yes—I know—but couldn't you tell anything about her?"

"It was dark." He tried to evade her direct questioning.

"But you turned on the—light," she persisted. "You said you did."

"Ye-es. She was—not very tall—and not very short — and she wore white — I think she was young—yes, I'm quite sure she was young, and—"

"Beautiful?" added Dorothy.

"Oh, yes!" he answered, laughing constrainedly.

"She had to be beautiful, of course, you know."

"She had red hair also, didn't she?" Dorothy asked, taking no notice of his attempted raillery.

Jimmie nodded. "Ye-es," he said. "I think her hair was red."

"You really don't like to talk about her—do you? All your heroines are red-haired, aren't they?" Dorothy smiled in a teasing, provoking sort of way. "Well, I must go and do my stunt and try to eclipse the beautiful red-haired Miss Doré!"

With this parting remark, which seemed like a shot in the dark, she left him to think it over.

"Good God!" muttered Jimmie, wiping the cold perspiration from his brow. "What does it all mean?"

The violinist was first on the program. The guests were just seated in the rows of gilt chairs which had been placed to resemble an orchestra in a theater when the velvet curtains were drawn aside and he made his appearance. He was only applauded and encored, then, bowing his thanks profusely, he made way for Dorothy, who, stepping upon the stage, seated herself at the grand piano and, playing her own accompaniments, sang some little folk songs in a charming, unaffected manner. Even Jimmie was affected by the soft, musical timbre of her voice.

But she refused to be encored, and very daintily introduced Martha, who was to follow her—then she stood aside on one corner of the stage to watch the other's performance. Rand Doré came upon the stage as Martha did, and Jimmie, with no little surprise, saw he was to furnish the music for Martha's dance.

Martha had removed her vivid green gown, and now appeared in a filmy, soft, white robe of Grecian lines. She had wrapped about her many voluminous veils of various pastel tones; as she danced she gave one the impression of a human rainbow. Her small, bare feet seemed to scarcely touch the ground—she was like a zephyr, lighter than the air.

The rainbow-hued veils floated about her, twisting and turning themselves around her slender, white-clad figure; her bare arms moved in perfect rhythm with her body, her glorious, unbound hair hung like a crimson

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cloud about her shoulders—it writhed and curled like a living fire as her body undulated to the weird, unusual strains of music—music more in keeping with the man who played than with the living embodiment of the dance upon the stage.

Jimmie got the impression that it was improvised by Doré as he played; but his knowledge of Martha's technique told him this was impossible, and he racked his brains trying to recall some portion of Brahms or Tschaikowsky by which to call the weird motif.

Martha's audience sat enthralled. Never had she danced so wonderfully. Hers was the poetry of motion. She seemed to bring Athens into New York. Suddenly she gave a startled cry, wavered, then sank to the floor a crumpled heap of rainbow-hued chiffon and tulle.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Delia Dean Butts In

by Berton Braley

A SLENDER, graceful girl in a natty, dark brown tailored suit alighted from the street-car near the plate-glass windows and speckless white front of the Home Grocery. From under her pert little hat there were glimpses of red-brown hair, and a pair of alert sparkling-brown eyes looked upon the world—or that part of it represented by the main street of Midvale—with approval.

"Smart little suburban burg," observed Delia Dean, as the car went its way and the conductor glanced back at her with a final look that registered tribute. "Filigree Biscuit ought to play to S. R. O. here."

She swung across the street, her suit-case in her hand, with a lithe ease that bespoke supple muscles and vigorous health, and entered the grocery door. A clerk met her, with what is known as a pleasant commercial smile.

"What can I do for you?" he queried.

"That's easy," responded Delia, "you can organize yourself into a searching party of one and discover the whereabouts of the main squeeze in this outfit. My information from the secret service tells me that his name is Orchard—though it doesn't say what kind of an Orchard."

"Oh," said the clerk, "you want to see Mr. Orchard."

"You have me, Mr. Stevenson," agreed Delia. "Your powers of deduction are worthy of notice. I shall speak to the Secretary of War and see if he can't give you a job decoding ciphers in the intelligence department."

The clerk looked at Delia's suit-case suspiciously.

"I heard him say this morning," he said, "that he was all stocked up and wasn't going to be in the market for some time."

"The marines have an office down the street, I noticed as I came up," Delia told him, "and they might be interested in your

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information. I'm not. Please tell Mr. Orchard that Miss Delia Dean, of the Filigree Biscuit Company, has arrived on the scene, prepared to demonstrate the superior qualities of the best food in the market to a palpitant throng, and that she would like to see him and learn where to locate the heavy artillery for the drive."

She set down her suit-case and stood, waiting. The clerk hesitated and then proceeded to the rear of the store whence he returned in a moment with the proprietor, a full-fed, round-faced, red-cheeked individual that anybody would know for a grocer even if disguised in the garb of a grand duke.

"How do you do, Miss Dean," he beamed, "I have been looking for you."

"Your scout was somewhat asleep on the job then," commented Delia crisply, with a grin at the clerk, "but now we're all here together, I'd like to get busy."

"Certainly," said Orchard, "Arkins, get a table for Miss Dean."

"I didn't see your taxi," he explained, as the clerk departed, "or I would have met you myself."

"Strange," Delia replied, "it stopped almost in front of the store. Then it went on up the track."

"You came up on the car," the grocer observed reprovingly, "with that heavy suit-case?"

"It isn't any heavier in a street-car than in a taxi," Delia told him, "and I'm pretty much off of taxis, anyhow. I'm buying war-stamps with the fare I save and the Filigree Company lets me charge up the difference in expenses just the same. Patriotism is the silent partner in our outfit."

"That's very fine," said Orchard. "I've been trying to do my bit, also. I've subscribed quite heavily to all the Liberty Loans."

"Good man," Delia commended him, "and now that's settled I'll just unpack my stuff and get on the job."

She unfolded a spotless linen cloth and placed it over the table the clerk brought her, set up the cocoa-boiler, piled a few packages of various kinds of Filigree products in orderly fashion about the table, opened a box or two, and after putting the dainty cream-pitcher and the sugar-bowl where she wanted them, closed the suit-case and handed it to the clerk with the request that he hide it somewhere.

"Now," she advised the grocer, "if you'll sell me a bottle of cream and a package of cocoa and tell me where I can get some water to fill this boiler with, you needn't do anything more until the frantic mob I shall educate in the virtues of Filigree storms your counter to buy."

"What do I owe you for this?" Delia asked a few minutes later when the cream and cocoa had been placed before her.

"The cream is sixty cents a pint," said Orchard, "and the cocoa is fifty cents."

"Listen," protested Delia, "you understand I just want ordinary cream, not cream with pearl dust in it, and I asked for cocoa, not powdered gold."

"Things are very high now, you know," the grocer answered, "on account of the war."

"Yes," said Delia, "but cream, wholesale, costs around thirty or forty cents a pint, and the wholesale price of this particular brand of cocoa happens to be eighteen cents a package. I know, because usually the firm supplies me with it, only this morning I ran out."

Orchard looked somewhat sheepish.

"Well, of course," he conceded, "I might shade those prices for you a little, inasmuch as you are sort of in the business. Suppose we make the cream forty-five cents and the cocoa thirty cents."

"Suppose we do," agreed Delia, and lighted the alcohol burner under the cocoa urn as the clerk brought her water to fill it.

The cocoa was boiling merrily when two women customers entered the store. Delia gave them her friendly smile—a smile that was as real and honest as the clerk's was false—and called out cheerily:

"It's just far enough from breakfast time so I'm sure you will enjoy a cup of cocoa and a sample of Filigree biscuit, the soda cracker that is as filling as beefsteak yet as delicious and dainty as bonbons. Crisp, tasty, healthful and satisfying. Try one—and you will want more. There is no obligation to buy; in fact I simply demonstrate these, I do not sell them. But you

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can get them in the store—and the price is one of the few prices that have not gone up on account of the war."

The two women drew close to the table and sampled the biscuit.

"It is delicious," they agreed. "I think I'll want a couple of boxes of the luncheon biscuit," said one. "I'll need some dessert wafers," the other decided.

Mr. Orchard approached.

"How much are your Filigree luncheon wafers?" he was asked.

"Thirteen cents a box, madam," he responded.

"And the dessert wafers?"

"Twenty-three cents."

"Very well, I'll take two boxes of the luncheon crackers. And I'll want two of the dessert ones."

"I'm sure Mr. Orchard has made a mistake," said Delia, sweetly; "he must have got Filigree mixed with something else, because the retail price of luncheon biscuit is ten cents and of dessert wafers twenty, just the same as before the war. The Filigree Company has actually reduced the wholesale price by more efficient methods of manufacture, so that the retailer could make a cent more on each box without increasing the price. Didn't you make a mistake, Mr. Orchard?"

"Well, I—h-m—I—why of course, I was thinking of another brand. Filigree is still the same. How many packages did you say?" He turned to the customers, his ruddy face somewhat purpled. "Was there anything else?"

"Yes," one of the women replied, "I want two pounds of prunes, a pound of American cheese, a pound of lima beans, and a pound of butter. How much will that be?"

"Let's see," said the grocer, "prunes, fifty cents; cheese, forty-five cents; beans, twenty-six cents; creamery butter, fifty-five cents. One dollar and seventy-six cents."

"My," exclaimed the woman, "things are high, aren't they?"

Orchard shook his head sadly.

"Yes," he admitted, "they are high. It's on account of the war, you know."

Delia, busying herself with some other customers who lingered at her table, nevertheless had an ear for the conversation. Also she was humming lightly a tune which gradually percolated to Orchard's sensibilities.

He had heard it played in a show he saw recently. What was it? Oh—once again his face grew somewhat purple. He had recognized the tune. It was: "Going Up." Delia, glancing at the grocer's broad back, noted with satisfaction the full red creeping up his fat neck. Evidently he "got her."

But he went on filling out the bill for the other customer, who wanted two pounds of corn meal, a pound of wheat flour, a loaf of bread, and two dozen eggs.

"Corn meal, twenty cents; flour, ten cents; bread, eleven cents; two dozen eggs, one dollar and fifty cents," murmured the grocer, keeping his voice so low that Delia couldn't hear him.

Somehow that girl worried him. Of course he was running his own business, and it wasn't any of her affair, but she knew too darn much about prices. It was too bad a man couldn't make a decent profit without a snip of a girl butting in.

As the two women started out with their purchases, Delia signaled them to stop a moment. Orchard, who had turned to wait on other patrons, turned back to watch her.

He was so intent on her actions that one of the customers, a nervous little woman, walked out, sniffing. She wasn't going to be kept waiting while a grocer stared at a pretty demonstrator. This gave Orchard jolt enough so that he forgot Delia and attended to the other woman.

"I just thought these might be useful to you," Delia was saying to the two women, as she handed them each a sheet of paper. "I always have them mailed to me wherever I am demonstrating. You see, the Filigree Company feels that as long as it is doing everything possible to keep its prices down and help win the war, it ought to help the public with what information it can."

"What is this?" queried the taller woman.

"It's just the Federal Food Board Bulletin which shows what wholesale prices

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are and what retail prices are supposed to be in certain localities. You can find the cost of nearly any article you buy in it. They're very handy, sometimes."

"How interesting," agreed the first woman. "I wonder if it says anything about the prices on what I got this morning." She looked it over. "Prunes, wholesale, fifteen cents; retail, nineteen cents; American cheese, wholesale, twenty-seven cents; retail, thirty-three cents; lima beans, wholesale, seventeen; retail, twenty cents; creamery butter, wholesale, forty-three cents; retail, forty-eight. H-m."

She opened her purse and glanced at the bill she had just paid. Her face clouded.

The other woman was making a similar comparison, with similar results, except that she snorted: "The robber!"

Delia chuckled.

"It isn't always the middleman who sticks you, is it?" she remarked. "The little fellow around the corner sometimes gets his."

The smaller woman, whose face had set in lines of stern determination, nodded.

"I know one who's going to get his now," she promised, and she marched back to where Orchard was standing. Her companion followed.

"Mr. Orchard," she said, "I've decided I don't want any of this stuff. I've just learned that you're soaking me from fifteen to fifty per cent more than a fair profit on what I'm getting and I'm not going to stand for it."

Her voice was raised, and every customer in the store heard it.

"Eggs should be fifty cents a dozen and you've charged me seventy-five cents, corn meal should be eight cents a pound and you've made it ten cents, and so on for everything. I'm willing to pay my share of the extra cost of things on account of the war, but I don't see any reason why you shouldn't bear part of it yourself instead of putting it all on your customers and adding ten or twenty or thirty per cent more for good measure."

Orchard, startled, nevertheless remained the suave merchant.

"You are very much mistaken, madam," he replied. "My prices are fair. I'm afraid you've been deceived by some of the sensational newspapers talking about profiteers."

For answer the woman thrust the Federal Food Board list into his hand. "That's not a sensational newspaper," she said.

"Oh, that," he responded easily—"that list leads lots of people astray. Those are theoretical prices made up by a lot of college professors and impractical people like that."

"All right," agreed the woman, "if you can prove that, I'm satisfied. Just show me your bills from the wholesaler and whatever they are, I'll agree to pay you ten per cent more than the margin of profit allowed by the food board, on condition that if the wholesale price you pay is the same or less than the food board wholesale prices, you let me have the things for ten per cent less than that margin. That's a fair bet, as my husband would say."

The grocer's suavity disappeared.

"I haven't time to monkey with such things," he growled. "I'm too busy. If you don't want those articles, leave them."

She left them—and her friend left hers. Both went out, followed by nearly all the customers who had heard her voice.

Most of them knew her, and there was an excited conclave on the sidewalk outside the store as they clustered about her to read the Food Board bulletin. Presently the group dissolved, several of them to come in to Delia's table and ask her if she had any more of the bulletins.

"All you like," said Delia; "our company sees that all its salesmen and demonstrators have lots of these. Food will win the war, you know. If you write to the Food Board they'll send you bulletins right along."

The bevy of women withdrew and quiet reigned in the Home Grocery for a minute. But only for a minute, because Orchard, more purple than ever, descended upon Delia wrathfully.

"What's the idea?" he demanded. "Whaddyuh mean butting into my business and driving my customers out?"

"Butting into your business!" repeated Delia, innocently. "Far be it from me, far, oh very far be it from me to do that.

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I'm only an honest working girl demonstrating Filigree Biscuit, the daintiest, crispest, most satis—"

"Can that chatter," grumped Orchard. "You know what I mean. You set all those women by the ears and started all this row."

"Row?" said Delia. "I didn't make any row. I was standing here as calm and as cool as the well-known cucumber—not so well known since the price went up—when the lady began to read the riot act to you."

"Yes, and you gave her the idea by handing her that devilish bulletin," shouted Orchard. "You egged her on to jump me about my prices."

"No, you're wrong, Algernon, all wrong," Delia informed him. "I didn't egg her on. I couldn't afford to egg her on with the price you charge for eggs here. All I did was to give her a bulletin and tell her it sometimes came handy. Wasn't I right? Didn't she find it handy?"

"Well, I don't want any more of it," decreed Orchard. "You're here to demonstrate Filigree Biscuit, not to run my business for me."

Delia's eyes glowed, but her reply was: "'Sir!' said the lady, 'I may be only a demonstrator, but I have my feelings.' And no fat pirate camouflaged as a grocer can pull any of that rough stuff on me. Listen, my dear Mr. Bandit, I'm working for the Filigree Biscuit Company and you have a nice little contract with them which says that I'm to demonstrate here for one week, beginning to-day. Well, I've begun, and I intend to finish. Better men than you have tried to get me fired, and it didn't work. And there isn't anything in the contract which says that I can't talk to the customers, or hand them literature as I choose."

"But it's literature that's damaging to my business. Why, I could sue your company and—"

"Sue!" exclaimed Delia. "That's a merry idea. Sure, why not. You trot right back to the office and call up your lawyer. Tell him all about it. Tell him that you want to sue the Filigree Biscuit Company because Delia Dean is handing your customers bulletins which show how much food costs, and that's it's damaging your business, because you're grabbing twenty-five or fifty per cent more than a fair profit and if all your customers discover that, you won't be able to get away with it. Tell him the food bulletin is seditious literature, dangerous to the peace and security of the business of grand and petty larceny and you want five million dollars damages. Then come back and whisper in my lily ear what he says."

Orchard, choking, glared at her — but was speechless.

"You make me very, very tired," Delia went on. "You boast about doing your bit because you bought a few bonds, which are about the finest investment you could possibly get, and then you're doing your Sunday school best to help the Kaiser by hogging profits and holding up families for the necessities of life. You sell war-savings stamps over the counter, and take so much away from the people who buy groceries from you that they can't afford to get the stamps. Great is the Kaiser and the profiteer is his prophet."

"I'm a good loyal American," Orchard defended.

"You're a bunk patriot," Delia answered, her eyes flashing. "It's men like you who do more harm than all the soap-box orators put together. Wake up, old top, wake up! Didn't you ever stop to think that every time you put an extra ten per cent in your pocket you don't really earn, you're making it ten per cent harder for other people to back up the boys over there in the trenches? Instead of getting yours you ought to be giving yours! A good loyal American—you're about as loyal as Benedict Arnold. He sold out his country for a lump sum; you're helping to sell it out a little at a time, retail prices—fifty per cent too high."

The grocer's round face had lost its rudiness. It was slightly pale, and he wet his lips. There was a puzzled look in his eyes.

"Those are pretty hard words, Miss Dean," he finally remarked. "I don't think you're quite fair. Still—" he paused a moment. "Still, I must admit I hadn't thought of things the way you put them.

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Business is business, you know, and I am doing business to make money."

"Nobody wants to keep you from making money," said Delia. "You're entitled to do that, we all are. But we aren't entitled to make anything extra out of the war."

"A man is entitled to what he gets," insisted the grocer.

"It depends on how he gets it," Delia replied. "And in these piping times of war people aren't asking 'How much have you got?' but 'Why have you got so much?'"

He thought this over a bit.

"What if they do?" he said. "That won't affect your bank balance, will it?"

"Oh," said Delia, "that's where your heart is, eh? Very well then, I'm going to can this patriotic line and slip you the sort of dope you'll understand. I'd like to keep on appealing to you for your country's sake until you came to grace, but life is short and a wad of bills has no patriotism. So here is the proposition in simple commercial language.

"This isn't a very large suburb and the people know each other mighty well. And the dames who went out of here this morning are slipping the rest of their friends an earful about the way you were caught with the goods this morning. Is that going to help your trade? The answer is no. Judging by the sort of chin and eyes that little lady has who gave you the ranakabo this A.M., she's going to make life for you anything but a tender lullaby hereafter."

Orchard nodded, reluctantly.

"She's a Tartar when she gets started," he agreed. "Suffragette leader and everything."

"Very well then," Delia continued. "I've got a way out for you. You can beat her to it."

"How?"

"Is there a local daily here?"

"Yes."

"Then you're going to take a full page in it to-morrow morning and announce that the Home Grocery will hereafter be the 'Win-the-War' store — the grocery that made the food bulletins famous, and you'll guarantee to maintain Food Board prices in everything. You'll fill up your windows with placards to that effect and plaster your wagons with the same legend, and thereby you'll queer the determined dame's attempt to queer you, get the jump on the other grocers in Midvale, and have the people coming in here in droves and you'll make more money to buy bonds with than you thought there was in the burg. There's nothing in this high-class trade stuff any more, believe me. The rich dames are beginning to watch the prices of things as close as the poor ones always had to—and that sort of campaign I suggest will increase your cash business so much you'll wear out the register in a month. How about it?"

"It does sound rather good," Orchard admitted. "Maybe I'll try it."

"Maybe!" cried Delia. "You mean 'sure thing you'll try it.' I'm offering you a chance to save your life and make money doing it, and you say maybe you'll take the chance. Come on now, be a businessman and make up your mind to do the only thing you can do. Can't you hear your pocketbook urging you on to high deeds of patriotism—helping the people to save by selling three times as much goods at half the profit? Do you have to have ideas nailed into your head?"

"Well," Orchard smiled, "if I did, you certainly would be some hammer swinger. I'll do it. And I'm sorry I spoke so rough a while ago. You sure are a wise young person. By George, I'd like to have you work for me. Brains ain't so frequent around a grocery-store as a man would like. What salary would you want to be sort of general-assistant in the Home Grocery?"

"Ten thousand a year," replied Delia.

"Gosh!" said Orchard, "you're kidding."

"Nope," said Delia, "I'm serious."

"But I'll bet you're not getting anything like that from Filigree."

"No," said Delia.

"Then why—"

"Well," said Delia, "I like my job with Filigree pretty much and I wouldn't care to change. Besides," she grinned, "the price of brains is going up—on account of the war!"

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Square Deal Sanderson

by Charles Alden Seltzer

Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Slow Burgess," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

ON his way to work for the Double A Ranch, run by Mary Bransford after her father's death, "Square Deal" Sanderson killed the murderers of a man who proved to be Will Bransford, Mary's brother, correspondence taken from whose pockets revealed that he had been absent fifteen years. Approaching the Double A, which was fertile by contrast with the surrounding dryness, Sanderson checkmated Alva Dale, covetous of the ranch, in his attempted hanging of Ben Nyland, nester, for alleged cattle rustling from the Double A. Nyland's sister, Peggy, accused Dale of "planting" the steers in their corral, and when Dale questioned Sanderson's interference, the latter stated that he was Will Bransford.

Dale asked for proof, and Sanderson produced the Bransford letters, as also the money which Mary had forwarded her brother, and which the gunmen had taken. Dale, convinced against his will, released Nyland and left, with rage in his heart.

The die was cast—on an impulse Sanderson had impersonated another. Mary accepted him unquestioningly, and he found it impossible to disclose his identity even had he wished. The facts were these: Dale, utterly unscrupulous, desired the Double A; a part of his scheme to acquire it had been her father's negligence in recording her birth. This Sanderson attempted to obviate by having the title transferred to him, but he dared not sign the affidavit as Will Bransford, nor could he practise a forgery, since the letter containing the signature had mysteriously vanished. He learned further from Barney Owen, whom Mary had befriended, and who had penetrated his secret, of a plot between Dale and one Dave Silverthorn to possess the ranch by producing a man to impersonate the actual Bransford, the two murderers of the latter having been employed by Dale.

Time passed with Sanderson finding himself in love with Mary, nor was evidence lacking of reciprocation on her part. Then one day Dale appeared at the ranch with a request that Sanderson register his brand with him as deputy sheriff—thinking to trap him. Sanderson saw through the trick, Owen, unseen by Dale, cleverly imitated the signature, and at a whisper from the latter, Sanderson, giving Dale the paper, asked him abruptly for a letter dropped by the elder Bransford which Dale had picked up. "Fork it over," he grated, "or I'll bore you an' take it from your clothes."

CHAPTER XI.

THE ULTIMATUM.

DALE'S face whitened; for a moment he sat rigid, staring, his eyes boring into Sanderson's. Then he reached into a pocket, drew out a dirty envelope, and threw it at Sanderson's feet.

"You're a damned smart boy, ain't you, Bransford?" he sneered. "But I'm out to get you—remember that!"

"And you remember this, Dale!"

Sanderson was at the head of the horse Dale rode. His eyes were blazing with suppressed fury, brought on by the other's threat. "There's goin' to be a new deal in the basin. From now on I'm runnin' things—an' they're runnin' square! I ain't got any use for any law but this!" He tapped the butt of his six-shooter significantly. "An' if you go to gettin' mixed up with the Double A or the Nyland ranch you'll get it—plenty!"

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Dale grinned, hideously. Then he kicked his horse in the ribs and rode away.

Mary Bransford had not moved from her position on the porch. Sanderson watched Dale ride away, then he smiled at Mary and entered the house. Mary followed him. She saw Owen standing in the sitting-room, and her face showed her surprise.

Sanderson explained. "Owen an' me framed up on Dale," he said. "You saw it work."

"You'll be careful, won't you, Will?" she said.

"Deal," smilingly insisted Sanderson.

"Deal," she repeated, giving him a look that made him blush. Then she went into one of the other rooms, and Sanderson and Owen went outside. At the corner of the stable Sanderson halted and faced Owen.

"You've got some explainin' to do," he said. "How did you know Dale had a letter from Will Bransford to his father; an' how did you know that Dale wanted me to write my name on that brand-registering blank so he could compare it with Will Bransford's name on the letter?"

"Will Bransford told me he wrote such a letter; he showed me a letter from his dad which told how he had dropped Will's letter and how Dale had picked it up. Dale thought old Bransford hadn't seen him pick up the letter—but Bransford did see him. And last night I was snooping around over at the Bar D and I overheard Dale and Silverthorn cooking up this deal."

Sanderson grinned with relief. "Well," he said, "that name-signing deal sure had me considerable fussed up." He told Owen of his mental torture following the discovery of the letter that had disappeared from the dresser drawer. "We've got to run together from now on," he told Owen. "I'll be Bransford an' you'll be Bransford's name. Mebbe between us we'll make a whole man."

Over at the Bar D Dale was scowling at Silverthorn.

"He ain't Will Bransford," Dale declared. "He signed his name all O. K. an' regular, just the same as it was on the letter. But just the same he ain't a Bransford. There ain't no Bransford ever had an eye in him like he's got. He's a damned iceberg for nerve, an' there's more fight in him than there is in a bunch of wildcats—if you get him started!"

"Just the same," smiled Silverthorn, silkily, "we'll get the Double A. Look here—" And the two bent their heads together over Dale's desk.

CHAPTER XII.

DALE MOVES.

A PASSIONATE hatred of Alva Dale was slowly gripping Sanderson. It had been aroused on that first day of his meeting with the man, when he had seen Dale standing in front of the stable, bullying Mary Bransford and Peggy Nyland and her brother. At that time, however, the emotion Sanderson felt had been merely dislike—as Sanderson had always disliked men who attempted to bully others.

Sanderson's hatred of Dale was beginning to dominate him; it was overwhelming all other emotions. It dulled his sense of guilt for the part he was playing in deceiving Mary Bransford; it made him feel in a measure justified in continuing to deceive her.

For he divined that without his help Mary would lose the Double A.

Sanderson had always loved a fight, and the prospect of bringing defeat and confusion upon Dale was one that made his pulses leap with delight.

He got up on the morning following Dale's visit, tingling with eagerness. And yet there was no sign of emotion in his face when he sat with Mary Bransford at breakfast, and he did not even look at her when he left the house, mounted his horse, and rode up the gorge that split the butte at the southern end of the range.

All morning he prowled over the table land, paying a great deal of attention to the depth of the gorge, estimating its capacity for holding water, scanning the far reaches of the big basin carefully, and noting the location of the buildings that dotted it.

Shortly after noon he rode back to the house and came upon Mary in the kitchen.

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"I've put off askin' until now," he said while eating the food that Mary placed before him. "How much money did dad leave?"

"Not much," she said. "He was never very prosperous. It took a great deal to send me to school, and the thousand I sent you I saved myself out of the allowance he gave me. I think there are three thousand dollars to father's credit at the bank in Okar."

"Where's Okar?"

She looked quickly at him. "Don't you remember Okar? That little town just beyond the mouth of the basin? Why, you've been there a good many times, Will, on errands for father. There wasn't much to Okar when you were here—just a few shanties and a store. Surely you remember!"

Sanderson flushed. "I reckon I do remember, now that you speak of it," he lied. "But I don't think Okar has grown much."

"Okar has grown to be an important town—for this locality," Mary smiled. "You see, the railroad has made it grow. It is now quite large, and has a bank and a dozen or more stores. It is a depot for supplies for a big section, and the railroad company has built large corrals there. A man named Silverthorn—and Alva Dale—are the rulers of Okar, now."

"Who is Silverthorn?"

"He is connected with the railroad company—a promoter, or something of that character. He is trying to make a boom town of Okar. He has bought a great deal of land in the basin."

"You know what he wants the land for?" Sanderson smiled at her.

"For speculation purposes, I suppose. If he could get water—"

"You've figured it out," said Sanderson. "But he won't get water. The water belongs to the Double A—to me an' to you. An' we're goin' to sell it, ourselves."

"You mean—" began Mary.

"That we're going to build an irrigation dam—with all the fixin's. You and me."

The girl sat erect, her eyes luminous and eager. "Do you think we can do it?" she whispered.

"Do you think you could trust me with the three thousand you said dad left? An' would you be willin' to mortgage the Double A—if we needed more money?"

"Why," she declared, breathlessly, "the Double A is yours—to do with as you see fit. If you want to try—and you think there is a chance to win—why, why—go to it!"

"You're a brick!" grinned Sanderson. "We'll start the ball to rollin' right away."

Sanderson could not escape the vigorous hug she gave him, but he did manage to evade her lips, and he went out of the house blushing and grinning.

It was late in the afternoon when he got to Okar. Barney Owen was with him. The two rode into town, dismounted at a hitching rail in front of a building across the front of which was a sign:

THE OKAR HOTEL.

Okar was flourishing—as Mary Bransford said. At its northwestern corner the basin widened, spreading between the shoulders of two mountains and meeting a vast stretch of level land that seemed to be endless.

Okar sat at the foot of the mountain that lifted its bald knob at the eastern side of the basin's mouth. Two glittering lines of steel that came from out of the obscurity of distance eastward skirted Okar's buildings and passed westward into an obscurity equally distant.

The country around Okar was devoted to cattle. Sanderson's practised eye told him that. The rich grass land that spread from Okar's confines was the force that had brought the town into being, and the railroad would make Okar permanent.

Okar did not look permanent, however. It was of the type of the average cow-town of the Western plains—artificial and crude. Its buildings were of frame, hurriedly knocked together, representing the haste of a people in whom the pioneer instinct was strong and compelling—who cared nothing for appearances, but who fought mightily for wealth and progress.

Upon Okar was the stamp of newness, and in its atmosphere was the eagerness and the fervor of commercialism. Okar

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was the trade mart of a section of country larger than some of the old-world states.

Fringing the hitching rails in front of its buildings were various vehicles—the heavy wagons of Mexican freighters, the light buckboard of the cattleman, and the prairie-schooner of the homesteader. Mingling with the vehicles were the cow-ponies of horsemen who had ridden into town on various errands; and in the company corrals were many cattle awaiting shipment.

Sanderson stood beside his horse at the hitching-rail for a look at Okar.

There was one street—wide and dust-windrowed, with two narrow board walks skirting it. The buildings—mostly of one story—did not interest Sanderson, for he had seen their kind many times, and his interest centered upon the people.

"Different from Tombstone," he told Owen as the two entered the hotel. "Tombstone is cattle—Okar is cattle *and* business. I sort of like cattle better."

Owen grinned. "Cattle are too slow for some of Okar's men," he said. "There's men here that figure on making a killing every day—financially. Gamblers winning big stakes, supply dealers charging twenty times the value of their stuff; a banker wanting enormous interest on his money; the railroad company gobbling everything in sight—and Silverthorn and Dale framing up to take all the land and the water rights. See that short, fat man playing cards with the little one at that table?"

He indicated a table near the rear of the barroom, visible through an archway that opened from the room in which a clerk with a thin, narrow face and an alert eye presided at a rough desk.

"That's Maison—Tom Maison, Okar's banker. They tell me he'd skin his grandmother if he thought he could make a dollar out of the deal." Owen grinned. "He's the man you're figuring to borrow money from—to build your dam."

"I'll talk with him to-morrow," said Sanderson.

In their room Sanderson removed some of the stains of travel from his face and clothing. Then, telling Owen he would see him at dusk, he went out into the street.

Okar was buzzing with life and humming with activity when Sanderson started down the board walk. In Okar was typified the spirit of the West that was to be—the intense hustle and movement that were to make the town as large and as powerful as many of its sister cities.

Threading his way through the crowd on the board walk, Sanderson collided with a man. He grinned, not looking at the other, apologized, and was proceeding on his way, when he chanced to look toward the doorway of the building he was passing.

Alva Dale was standing just inside the doorway, watching him, and as Sanderson's gaze met his Dale grinned sneeringly.

Sanderson's lips twitched with contempt. His own smile matched Dale's in the quality of its hostility.

Sanderson was about to pass on when some one struck him heavily between the shoulders. He staggered and lurched against the rough board front of the building, going almost to his knees.

When he could steady himself he wheeled, his hand at his hip. Standing near him, grinning maliciously, was the man with whom he had collided.

In the man's right hand was a pistol.

"Bump into me, will you—you locoed shorthorn!" sneered the man as Sanderson turned. He cursed profanely, incoherently. But he did not shoot.

The weapon in his hand began to sag curiously, the fingers holding it slowly slipping from the stock. And the man's face—thin and seamed—became chalklike beneath the tan upon it. His eyes, furtive and wolfish, bulged with astonishment and recognition, and his mouth opened vacuously.

"Deal Sanderson!" he said, weakly. "Good Lord! I didn't git a good look at you! I'm in the wrong pew, Deal, an' I sure don't want none of your game!"

"Dal Colton," said Sanderson. His voice was cold and even as he watched the other sheathe his gun. "Didn't know me, eh? But you was figurin' on pluggin' me."

He walked close to the man and stuck his face close to the other, his lips in a straight line. He knew Colton to be one of the most conscienceless "killers" in the section of the country near Tombstone.

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"Who was you lookin' for, then?" demanded Sanderson.

"Not you—that's a cinch!" grinned the other, figeting nervously under Sanderson's gaze. He whispered to Sanderson, for in the latter's eyes he saw signs of a cold resolve to sift the matter to the bottom:

"Look here, Square; I sure don't want none of your game. Things has been goin' sorta offish for me for a while, an' so when I meets a guy a while ago who tells me to 'git' a guy named Will Bransford—pointin' you out to me when your back was turned—I takes him up. I wasn't figgerin'—"

"Who told you to get Bransford?" demanded Sanderson.

"A guy named Dale," whispered Colton.

Sanderson turned swiftly. He saw Dale still standing in the doorway. Dale was grinning coldly, and Sanderson knew he suspected what had been whispered by Colton. But before Sanderson could move, Dale's voice was raised loudly and authoritatively:

"Arrest that man—quick!"

A man behind Sanderson lunged forward, twisting Sanderson around with the impetus of the movement. Off his balance, Sanderson saw three or four other men dive toward Colton. He saw Colton reach for the weapon he had previously sheathed; saw the weapon knocked from his hand.

Four men seized Colton, and he struggled helplessly in their grasp as he was dragged away, his face working malignantly as he looked back at Dale.

"Double-crossed!" he yelled; "you damned, grinnin' coyote!"

A crowd had gathered; Sanderson shouldered his way toward Dale and faced him. Sanderson's face was white with rage, but his voice was cold and steady as he stood before Dale.

"So that's the way you work, is it, Dale? I'll give you what you was goin' to pay Colton, if you'll pull your gun right now!"

Dale's smile was maddeningly insolent.

"Bah!" he said; "I'm an officer of the law. There are a dozen of my men right behind you! Pull your gun! I'd like nothing better than to have an excuse to perforate you! Sanderson, eh?" he laughed. "Well, I've heard of you. Square Deal, eh? And here you are, masqueradin' as Will Bransford! That's goin' to be quite an interestin' situation at the Double A when things get to goin' right, eh?"

He laughed again, raucously, and turned his back to Sanderson, disappearing into the store.

Sanderson glanced behind him. Several men were watching him, their faces set and determined. Sanderson grinned at them and continued his interrupted walk down the street.

But something had been added to his hatred of Alva Dale—the knowledge that Dale would not scruple to murder him on any pretext. Sanderson's grin grew wider as he walked, for he knew of several men who had harbored such evil intentions against him, and they—

But Dale was a stronger antagonist, and he had power and authority behind him. Still, his spirit undaunted, Sanderson's grin grew wider, though perhaps more grim. It was entirely worth while, now, the deceiving of the woman he had hoped to protect; it wasn't her fight, but his. And he would make the fight a good one.

CHAPTER XIII.

A PLOT THAT WORKED.

SANDERSON left the board walk and cut through a yard to the railroad. He followed the rails until he reached the station. To his question the station-agent informed him that Dave Silverthorn might be found in his office on the second floor of the building.

Sanderson went up. A sign on a glass door bore Silverthorn's name. Sanderson entered without knocking.

Silverthorn was seated at a desk in a far corner of the room. He looked up as Sanderson opened the door, and said shortly:

"Well—what is it?"

Sanderson crossed the room and halted beside the desk. For an instant neither man spoke. Sanderson saw a man of

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medium height with a rather well-rounded stomach, sloping shoulders, and a sleek, well-fed appearance. His cheeks were full and florid, his lips large and loose; his eyes cold, calculating, and hard.

Silverthorn saw a lean-faced, broad-shouldered young man with a strong chin, a firm mouth, and an eye that fixed him with a steady, unwavering interest.

By the gleam in Sanderson's eyes Silverthorn divined that he was in the presence of a strong, opposing force, and he drew a slow, deep breath.

"Well?" he said, again.

"You're Dave Silverthorn?"

The other nodded. "What can I do for you?" he questioned.

"You can listen while I talk," said Sanderson.

"I'm Will Bransford, of the Double A. I have heard from several sources that you an' Alva Dale are after the title to the Double A. You want the water rights. You can't have them. An' the title to the Double A stays with me. Understand that? I am goin' to hold on to the property.

"I've heard you can juggle the law—that's your business. But you can't juggle the law enough to horn in on the Double A. If you do, I'm comin' for you with a law of my own!" He tapped his gun-holster significantly.

"That's all," he concluded. "Are you sure you understand?"

"Perfectly," answered Silverthorn. He was smiling mirthlessly, his face blotched and bloated with mingled fear and rage. "But I'll have you understand this: I am not afraid of your threats. You can't bully me. The S. and M. Railroad has dealt with your kind on more than one occasion. There is an opportunity here to develop a large section of land, and my company means to do it. We mean to be fair, however. We'll buy your title to the Double A. How much do you want for it?"

Sanderson grinned. "The Double A is not for sale. I wouldn't sell it to *you* for a million! You cheap crooks think that all you have to do is take anything you want. I just stopped in to tell you that I'm wise to your game, an' that the kind of law I represent ain't cluttered up with angles an' technical processes. She runs straight to a square deal all around. That's all, Mr. Silverthorn."

He turned and went out, closing the door behind him.

He had not intended to have his talk with Tom Maison, Okar's banker, until the following morning. But upon returning to Okar's street he saw Maison ahead of him on the sidewalk. He followed the banker, saw him enter the front door of the bank building, and a few minutes later he was sitting opposite Maison at a table in the banker's private room.

Maison was short and pudgy, short of breath, with a pasty complexion.

"Will Bransford, eh?" he said, looking sharply at Sanderson over the table. "H-m. You don't look much like your father."

"Nor I don't act like him, either," smiled Sanderson. "For instance," he went on at the banker's quick look, "dad was slow; he wasn't alive to his opportunities. How long has it been since the railroad came to Okar?"

"Five years."

"Then dad was five years slower than he ought to have been. He ought to have seen what water would do to the basin. He didn't. He left that for me."

"Meaning what?" asked Maison, as Sanderson paused.

"Meanin' that I want to turn the Double A water into the basin. That's what I came here to see you for. I want to mortgage the Double A. to the limit; I want to build a dam, irrigation canals, locks, an' everything that goes with it. It will take a heap of money."

Maison reflected. "And you want me to supply it," he said. "Yes, that project will require a large sum. H-m! It is— er —do you purpose to try to handle the project yourself, Mr. Bransford?"

"Me an' Mary Bransford. I'll hire an engineer."

Maison's cheeks reddened a trifle. He seemed to lose interest slightly.

"Don't you think it is rather too big a thing for one man to handle—aided by a woman?" He smiled blandly at Sanderson. "I have thought of the water situa-

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tion in the basin. It is my opinion that it might be worked out successfully.

"Why not organize a company—say a company composed of influential and powerful men like Silverthorn and Dale and—er—myself. We could issue stock, you know. Each would take a certain number of shares—paying you for them, of course, and leaving you in possession of a large block of it—say—forty per cent. We could organize, elect officers—"

"An' freeze me out," smiled Sanderson.

Maison sat erect and gazed haughtily at his visitor.

"No one has ever questioned my honesty," he declared.

Sanderson smiled at him. "Nor I don't. But I want to play her a lone hand."

"I am afraid I wouldn't be interested in that sort of project," said Maison.

The thought that Maison *would* be interested—not publicly, but privately—made Sanderson grin. The grin angered Maison; he got up and smiled coldly.

"I am sorry to have taken your time, Mr. Bransford," he said, dismissing his visitor.

Sanderson did not give up. "My father left some money in your bank," he said; "I'll take it."

"Certainly," said the banker. He got a withdrawal blank and laid it before Sanderson.

"The amount is three thousand two hundred," he said. "Just fill that out and sign your name and you can have the money."

Sanderson did not sign; he sat, looking at the blank, suddenly afflicted with the knowledge that once more the troublesome "Bransford" signature had placed him in a dilemma.

Undoubtedly Maison, Silverthorn, and Dale were confederates in this matter, and Dale's insistence that he sign the register claim was a mere subterfuge to obtain a copy of the Bransford signature in order to make trouble for him. It occurred to Sanderson that the men suspected him, and he grinned coldly as he raised his eyes to Maison.

Maison was watching him, keenly; and his flush when he saw Sanderson looking at him convinced the latter that his suspicions were not without foundation.

If Sanderson could have known that he had hardly left the hotel when a man whispered to Maison; and that Maison had said to the man: "All right, I'll go down and wait for him," Sanderson could not have more accurately interpreted Maison's flush.

Sanderson's grin grew grim. "It's a frame-up," he told himself. His grin grew saturnine. He got up, folded the withdrawal blank and stuck it in a pocket.

"I'm leavin' the money here to-night," he said. "For a man that ain't been to town in a long while, there'd be too many temptations yankin' at me."

He went out, leaving Maison to watch him from a window, a flush of chagrin on his face.

Sanderson walked down the street toward the hotel. He would have Owen sign the withdrawal blank before morning—that would defeat Maison's plan to gain evidence of the impersonation.

Sanderson had not been gone from Silverthorn's office more than five minutes when Dale entered. Silverthorn was sitting at his desk scowling, his face pale with big, heavy lines in it showing the strain of his interview with Sanderson.

"Bransford's been here!" guessed Dale, looking at Silverthorn.

Silverthorn nodded, cursing.

"You don't need to feel conceited," laughed Dale; "he's been to see me, too."

Dale related what had happened on the street some time before, and Silverthorn's scowl deepened.

"There are times when you don't seem to be able to think at all, Dale!" he declared. "After this, when you decide to do a thing, see me first—or Maison. The last thing we want to happen right now is to have this fake Bransford killed."

"Why?"

"I've just got word from Las Vegas that he's submitted his affidavit establishing his identity, and that the court has accepted it. That settles the matter until—or unless—we can get evidence to the contrary. And if he dies without us getting that evidence we are through."

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"Him dyin' would make things sure for us," contended Dale. "Mary Bransford wouldn't have any claim—us havin' proof that she ain't a Bransford."

"This fellow is no fool," declared Silverthorn. "Suppose he's wise to us, which he might be, and he has willed the property to the girl. Where would we be, not being able to prove that he isn't Will Bransford?"

Dale meditated. Then he made a wry face. "That's right," he finally admitted. He made a gesture of futility. "I reckon I'll let you do the plannin' after this."

"All right," said Silverthorn, mollified. "Have you set Morley on Barney Owen?"

"Owen was goin' right strong a few minutes after this Bransford guy left him," grinned Dale.

"All right," said Silverthorn; "go ahead the way we planned it. But don't have our friend killed."

When Sanderson entered the hotel there was no one in the office but the clerk, who was pondering over the register.

Dusk had fallen, and the light in the office was rather dim. Through the archway connecting the office with the saloon came a broad beam of light from a number of kerosene lamps. From beyond the archway issued the buzz of voices and the clink of glasses; peering through the opening Sanderson could see that the barroom was crowded.

Sanderson mounted the stairs leading from the office. When he had left Owen the latter had told Sanderson that it was his intention to spend the time until the return of his friend in reading.

Owen, however, was not in the room. Sanderson descended the stairs, walked to the archway that led into the saloon, and looked inside. In a rear corner of the barroom he saw Owen, seated at a table with several other men. Owen's face was flushed; he was talking loudly and extravagantly.

Sanderson remembered what Owen had told him concerning his appetite for strong liquor; he remembered, too, that Owen was in possession of a secret which, if divulged, would deliver Mary Bransford into the hands of her enemies.

Sanderson's blood rioted with rage and disgust. He crossed the barroom and stood behind Owen. The latter did not see him. One of the men with Owen did see Sanderson, though, and he looked up impudently, and smilingly pushed a filled glass of amber-colored liquor toward Owen.

"You ain't half drinkin' Owen," he said.

Sanderson reached over, took the glass, threw its contents on the floor and grasped Owen by the shoulder. His gaze met the tempter's, coldly.

"My friend ain't drinkin' no more tonight," he declared

The tempter sneered, his body stiffening.

"He ain't, eh?" he grinned, insolently. "I reckon you don't know him; he likes whisky as a fish likes water."

Several men in the vicinity guffawed loudly.

Owen was drunk. His hair was rumpled, his face was flushed, and his eyes were bleared and wide with an unreasoning, belligerent light as he got up, swaying unsteadily, and looked at Sanderson.

"Not drink any more?" he demanded loudly. "Who says I can't? I've got lots of money, and there's lots of booze here. Who says I can't drink any more?"

And now, for the first time, he seemed to realize that Sanderson stood before him. But the knowledge appeared merely to increase his belligerence to an insane fury. He broke from Sanderson's restraining grasp and stood off, reeling, looking at Sanderson with the grin of a satyr.

"Look who's telling me I can't drink any more!" he taunted, so that nearly every man in the room turned to look at him. "It's my guardian angel, gentlemen—Will Bransford, of the Double A! Will Bransford—ha, ha, ha! Will Bransford! Come an' look at him, gentlemen! Says I can't drink any more booze. He's running the Double A, Bransford is. There's a lot I could tell you about Bransford—a whole lot! He ain't—"

His maudlin talk broke off short, for Sanderson had stepped to his side and placed a hand over his mouth. Owen struggled, broke away, and shouted:

"Damn you, let me alone! I'm going to tell these people who you are. You're—"

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Again his talk was stilled. This time the method was swift and certain. Sanderson took another step toward him and struck. His fist landed on Owen's jaw, resounding with a vicious *smack!* in the sudden silence that had fallen, and Owen crumpled and sank to the floor in an inert heap.

Sanderson was bending over him, preparing to carry him to his room, when there came an interruption. A big man, with a drawn six-shooter, stepped to Sanderson's side. A dozen more shoved forward and stood near him, the crowd moving back.

Sanderson sensed the movement and stood erect, leaving Owen still on the floor. One look at the hostile faces around him convinced Sanderson that the men were there by design.

He grinned mirthlessly into the face of the man with the drawn pistol.

"Frame-up, eh?" he said. "What's the game?"

"You're wanted for drawin' a gun on Dave Silverthorn—in his office. I'm a deputy sheriff, an' I've got a warrant for you. Want to see it?"

Sanderson did not answer. Here was a manifestation of Dale's power and cupidity.

The charge was a mere subterfuge, designed to deprive him of his liberty. Sanderson had no intention of submitting.

The deputy saw resistance in the gleam of Sanderson's eyes, and he spoke sharply, warningly:

"Don't try any funny business; I've a dozen men here!"

Sanderson laughed in his face. He lunged forward, striking bitterly with the movement. The deputy's body doubled forward—Sanderson's fist had been driven into his stomach. His gun clattered to the floor; he reached out blindly with his hands, trying to grasp Sanderson, who evaded him and struck upward viciously.

The deputy slid to the floor, and Sanderson stood beside the table, his gun menacing the deputy's followers.

Sanderson had worked fast. Possibly the deputy's men had anticipated no resistance from Sanderson, or they had been stunned with the rapidity with which he had placed their leader out of action.

Not one of them had drawn a weapon. They watched Sanderson silently as he began to back away from them, still covering them with his pistol.

Sanderson had decided to desert Owen; the man had proved a traitor, and could not expect any consideration. Owen might talk—Sanderson expected he would talk; but he did not intend to jeopardize his liberty by staying to find out.

He stepped backward cautiously, for he saw certain of the men begin to move restlessly. He cautioned them, swinging the muzzle of his pistol back and forth, the crowd behind him splitting apart as he retreated.

He had gone a dozen steps when some one tripped him. He fell backward, landing on his shoulders, his right elbow striking hard on the board floor and knocking the pistol out of his hand.

He saw the men surge forward, and he made a desperate effort to get to his feet. But he did not succeed. He was on his knees when several men, throwing themselves at him, landed on top of him. Their combined weight crushed him to the floor, but he squirmed out of the mass and got to his feet, striking at the faces he saw around him, worrying the men hither and yon, dragging them with him as he reeled under savage blows that were rained on him.

He had torn himself almost free; one man still clung to him, and he was trying to shake the fellow off, that he might hit him effectively, when a great weight seemed to fall on his head, blackness surrounded him, and he pitched face down on the floor.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE VOICE OF THE COYOTE.

WHEN Sanderson regained consciousness he was lying on his back on a board floor. His head seemed to have been smashed, he was dizzy and weak, but he sat up and looked around him.

Then he grinned wanly.

He was in jail. A heavy, barred door was in front of him; turning his head he saw an iron-grated window behind him. Door and window were set in heavy stone

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walls; two other stone walls, with a narrow iron cot sat against one of them, rose blankly on either side.

Sanderson got up, reeling, and went to the window. Darkness had come; he could see Okar's lights flickering and winking at him from the buildings that skirted the street. Various sounds reached his ears—Okar's citizens were enjoying themselves.

Sanderson did not watch the lights long. He walked to the cot, seated himself on its edge, rested his elbows on his knees and his chin in the upturned palms of his hands and reflected on what had occurred to him.

Remembering the four thousand dollars in bills of large denomination that Burroughs had paid him when leaving the Pig-Pen, his hand went to the money-belt around his waist.

Belt and money were gone!

Sanderson got up again, walked to the door and called.

A heavy-featured man slouched down the corridor and halted near the door.

"Awake, eh?" he grinned. "Dale sure did hand it to you—now, didn't he? Well," he added as Sanderson's lips straightened at his words, "what's eatin' you?"

"I had a belt with some money in it—four thousand. What's become of it?"

"Four thousand!" the man jeered. "That bump on the head is still affectin' you, I reckon. Four thousand—shucks!" He laughed. "Well, I ain't seen it—if that's any consolation to you. If you'd had it when you come here I'd sure seen it."

"Who brought me here?"

"Dale an' his first deputy—the guy you poked in the stummick, over in the Okar Hotel. They tell me you fi't like hell! What's Dale got ag'in' you? He sure was some het up about you."

Sanderson did not answer. He turned his back to the jailer and walked to the cot, again sitting on its edge. He heard the jailer sniff contemptuously, but he paid no attention to him.

Prominent in Sanderson's thoughts was the realization that Dale had taken his money. He knew that was the last of it—Dale would not admit taking it. Sanderson had intended to use the four thousand on the Double A irrigation project. The sum, together with the three thousand he meant to draw from the Okar bank, would have been enough to make a decent start.

Sanderson had some bitter thoughts as he sat on the edge of the cot, all of them centering around Dale, Silverthorn, Maison, Owen, Mary Bransford, and himself. He realized that he had been defeated in the first clash with the forces opposed to him, that Owen had turned traitor, that Mary Bransford's position now was more precarious than it had been before his coming, and that he had to deal with resourceful, desperate, and unscrupulous men.

And yet, sitting there at the edge of the cot, Sanderson grinned. The grin did not make his face attractive, for it reflected something of the cold, bitter humor and savage passion that had gripped his soul.

At noon the next day Sanderson, looking out of the window of his cell, heard a sound at the door. He turned, to see Silverthorn standing in the corridor.

Silverthorn smiled blandly at him.

"Over it, I see," he said. "They used you rather roughly, eh? Well, they tell me you made them step some."

Sanderson deliberately turned his back and continued to look out of the window.

"On your dignity, eh?" sneered Silverthorn. "Well, let me tell you something. We've heard a lot about you—from Dal Colton and Barney Owen. Morley—one of our men—got Owen soused last night, as per orders, and Owen spilled his knowledge of you all over the town. It's pretty well known, now, that you are Deal Sanderson, from down Tombstone way.

"I don't know what your game was, but I think it's pretty well queered by now. I suppose you had some idea of impersonating Bransford, hoping to get a slice of the property. I don't blame you for trying. It was up to us to see that you didn't get away with it.

"But we don't want to play hog. If you'll admit before a notary that you are not Will Bransford we'll hand you back the

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four thousand Dale took from you, give you ten thousand in addition and safe conduct out of the county. That strike you?"

Sanderson did not answer.

Silverthorn's face reddened. "You're a damned fool!" he sneered, venomously. "We'll keep you in jail here for a thousand years, if necessary. We'll do worse!

"Look here!" he suddenly said. But Sanderson did not turn. Silverthorn rattled a paper.

"Here's a withdrawal slip on the Okar Bank, calling for three thousand two hundred dollars, signed by Will Bransford. Barney Owen drew the money last night and blew it in, gambling and drinking. He says he's been signing Bransford's name —forging it—at your orders. The signature he put on this paper is a dead ringer for the one on the registry blank you gave Dale.

"Dale saw Owen sign that. That's why he knew you are not Will Bransford. Understand? Maison will swear you signed the withdrawal slip and got the money. We'll prove that you are not Bransford, and you'll go to the Las Vegas pen for twenty years! Now, let's talk business!"

Sanderson turned. There was a mirthless grin on his face. He spoke loudly, calling the jailer.

When the latter appeared in the corridor beside Silverthorn, Sanderson addressed him without looking at the other:

"You ain't on your job a heap, are you? There's a locoed coyote barkin' at me through the door, there. Run him out, will you—he's disturbin' me plenty."

He turned from the door, stretched himself on the cot and with his face to the wall listened while Silverthorn cursed.

CHAPTER XV.

DALE PAYS A VISIT.

SHORTLY after midnight Sanderson was sound asleep on the cot in the cell when a strange, scraping noise awakened him. He lay still for a long time, listening, until he discovered that the sound came from the window. Then he sat up stealthily and looked around to see, framed in the starlit gloom of the night, the face of Barney Owen, staring in through the window at him.

The sight of Owen enraged Sanderson, but his curiosity drove him to the window.

The little man was hanging to the iron bars; his neck muscles were straining, his face was red and his eyes bright.

"Don't talk, now!" he warned. "The boss of the dump is awake and he'll hear. He's in his room; there's nobody else around. I wanted to tell you that I'm going to knock him silly and get you out of this!"

"Why?" mocked Sanderson, lowly.

Owen's face grew redder. "Oh, I know I've got something coming, but I'm going to get you out all the same. I've got our horses and guns. Be ready!"

He slipped down. Sanderson could hear his feet thud faintly on the sand outside.

Sanderson got into his clothes and stood at the cell door, waiting. For a long time he heard no sound, but presently he caught the clank of a door, followed by a swift step, and Owen stood in the corridor before the cell door, a bunch of keys in his hand.

There was no word spoken. Owen unlocked the door, Sanderson slipped out, Owen passed him the six-shooter he had lost in the barroom of the Okar Hotel, and the two slipped noiselessly down the corridor.

A minute later they were mounting the horses that Owen had brought, and shortly afterward they were moving like shadows away from the outskirts of Okar.

Not until they were well out in the big basin did either of them speak. And then Sanderson said, shortly:

"Silverthorn was tellin' me you gassed everything. Are you feelin' better over it?"

Owen's head bent over his horse's mane; his chin was on his chest when he answered:

"Come and kill me."

"Hell!" exploded Sanderson, disgustedly. "If there was anything comin' to you killin' would be too good for you. You ain't done anything to me, you sufferin' fool —not a thing! What you've done you've done to Mary Bransford. When you see Dale an' Silverthorn grabbin' the Double

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A, an' Mary Bransford ridin' away, homeless—you'll have feelin's of remorse, mebbe—if you've got any *man* in you at all!"

Owen writhed and groaned.

"It was the whisky—the cursed whisky!" he whispered. "I can't let it alone—I love it! And once I get a taste of it, I'm gone—I'm a stark, staring lunatic!"

"I'd swear to that," grimly agreed Sanderson.

"I didn't mean to say a word to anybody," wailed the little man. "Do you think I'd do anything to harm Mary Bransford—after what she did for me? But I did—I must have done it. Dale said I did, Silverthorn said I did, and you say I did. But I don't remember. Silverthorn said I signed a receipt for some money from the Okar Bank—three thousand, odd. I don't remember. Oh, but I'm—"

"Callin' yourself names won't get you back to where you was before you made a fool of yourself," Sanderson told him, pityingly. "An' me tellin' you what I think of you won't relieve my feelin's a whole lot, for there ain't words enough layin' around loose.

"What I want to know is this: did you go clean loco, or do you remember *anything* that happened to you? Do you know who got the money you drew from the bank?"

"Dale," answered Owen. "He had that, for I remember him counting it in the back room of the hotel. There was more, too; I heard him telling Silverthorn there was about seven thousand in all. Silverthorn wanted him to put it all back in the bank, but Dale said there was just enough for him to meet his pay-roll—that he owed his men a lot of back pay. He took it with him."

"My four thousand," said Sanderson, shortly.

"Yours?" Owen paled.

"Dale lifted my money-belt," Sanderson returned. "I was wonderin' what he did with it. So that's what."

He relapsed into a grim silence, and Owen did not speak again.

They rode several miles in that fashion—Owen keeping his horse slightly behind Sanderson's, his gaze on the other's face, his own white with remorse and anxiety.

At last he heard Sanderson laugh, and the sound of it made him grit his teeth in impotent agony.

"Sanderson," he said, gulping, "I'm sorry."

"Sure," returned the other. "If I hadn't wised up to that quite a spell ago, you'd be back on the trail, waitin' for some coyote to come along an' get his supper."

They rode in silence for a long time. They came to the gentle slope of the basin and began to climb it.

A dozen times Owen rode close to Sanderson, his lips trembling over unuttered words, but each time he dropped back without speaking. His eyes, fixed worshipfully on the back of the big, silent man ahead of him, were glowing with anxiety and wonder.

In the ghostly darkness of the time before the gray forerunner of the dawn appears on the horizon they came in sight of the Double A ranch-house.

Sanderson was still leading. The ranch-house burst upon his vision as his horse topped a rise that had obscured his view of the ranch-house, and he saw it, clearly outlined.

Riding down the slope of the rise he smiled. For there was a light in one of the ranch-house windows. Mary had left it burn on his account, he divined.

He halted and allowed Owen to come near him.

"Mary ain't to hear about this deal tonight," he told the little man. "Not a peep—understand?"

Without waiting for an answer he rode onward.

Thinking that, perhaps, in spite of the burning lamp Mary might be sleeping, Sanderson cautiously dismounted at the corral gates, and, leaving Owen to put his own horse away, he walked toward the house, stealthily, for he did not wish to awaken the girl.

Half-way across the ranch-house yard, Sanderson saw a shadow cross the light in the window. Again he grinned, thinking Mary had not gone to bed after all.

But, going forward more unconcernedly, Sanderson's smile faded and was succeeded by a savage frown. For in the shadow formed by the little "L" at the junction

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of the house and porch, he saw a horse, saddled and bridled.

Suddenly alert, and yielding to the savage rage that gripped him, Sanderson stole softly forward and looked closely at the animal. He recognized it instantly as Dale's, and in the instant, his face pale, his eyes blazing with passion, he was on the porch, peering through one of the darkened windows.

Inside he saw Dale and Mary Bransford. They were in the sitting-room. Dale was sitting in a big chair, smoking a cigar, one arm carelessly thrown over the back of the chair, his legs crossed, his attitude that of the master.

Standing perhaps a dozen feet from him was Mary Bransford.

The girl's eyes were wide with fright and astonishment, disbelief, incredulity—and several other emotions that Sanderson could not analyze. He did not try. One look at her sufficed to tell him that Dale was baiting her, tantalizing her, mocking her, and Sanderson's hatred for the man grew in intensity until it threatened to overwhelm him.

There was in his mind an impulse to burst into the house and kill Dale where he sat. It was the primitive lust to destroy an unprincipled rival that had seized Sanderson, for he saw in Dale's eyes the bold passion of the woman-hunter.

However, Sanderson conquered the impulse. He fought it with the marvelous self-control and implacable determination that had made him feared and respected wherever men knew him, and in the end the faint, stiff grin on his face indicated that whatever he did would be done with deliberation.

This was an instance where the eavesdropper had some justification for his work, and Sanderson listened.

He heard Dale laugh—the sound of it made Sanderson's lips twitch queerly. He saw Mary cringe from Dale and press her hands over her breast. Dale's voice carried clearly to Sanderson.

"Ha, ha!" he said. "So *that* hurts, eh? Well, here's more of the same kind. We got Barney Owen drunk last night, and he admitted that he'd signed all of Sanderson's papers—the papers that were supposed to have been signed by your brother. Why didn't Sanderson sign them? Why? Because Sanderson couldn't do it.

"Owen, who knew your brother in Arizona, signed them, because he knew how to imitate your brother's writing. Get that! Owen signed a bank-receipt for the money old Bransford had in the bank. Owen got it and gave it to me. He was so drunk he didn't know what he was doing, but he could imitate your brother's writing, all right."

"You've got the money!" gasped the girl.

Again Dale laughed, mockingly. "Yep," he said; "I've got it. Three thousand two hundred. And I've got four thousand that belongs to that four-flusher, Square Deal. Seven thousand." He laughed again.

"Where is Sanderson?" questioned the girl.

"In jail, over in Okar." Dale paused long enough to enjoy the girl's distress. Then he continued: "Owen is in jail, too, by this time. Silverthorn and Maison are not taking any chances on letting him go around loose."

"Sanderson in jail!" gasped Mary. She seemed to droop; she staggered to a chair and sank into it, still looking at Dale, a despairing expression in her eyes.

Dale got up and walked to a point directly in front of her, looking down at her, triumphantly.

"That's what," he said. "In jail. Moreover, that's where they'll stay until this thing is settled. We mean to have the Double A. The sooner you realize that, the easier it will be for you.

"I'm offering you a way out of it—an easy way. That guy, Sanderson, ain't on the level. He's been working you, making a monkey of you—fooling you. He wants the Double A for himself. He's been hanging around here, passing himself off as your brother, aiming to get on the good side of you—getting you to love him good and hard. Then mebbe he'd tell you, thinking that you'd forgive him. But mebbe that wasn't his game at all. Mebbe he'd figured to grab the ranch and turn you out.

"Now, I'm offering you a whole lot. Mebbe you've thought I was sweet on that

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Nyland girl. Get that out of your mind. I was only fooling with her—like any man fools with a girl. I want her ranch—that's all. But I don't care a damn about the Double A, I want you. I've had my eye on you right along. Mebbe it won't be marriage right away, but—"

"Alva Dale!"

The girl was on her feet again, facing the man, her eyes blazing.

Dale did not retreat from her; he stood smiling at her, his face wreathed in a huge grin. He was enjoying the girl.

Sanderson slipped along the wall of the house and opened the door. It creaked loudly on its hinges with the movement, causing both Dale and the girl to turn and face it.

Mary Bransford stood rigid as she saw Sanderson standing in the doorway, a flush sweeping swiftly over her face. There was relief in her eyes.

Astonishment and stark, naked fear were in Dale's eyes. He shrank back a step, and looked swiftly at Sanderson's right hand, and when he saw that it held a six-shooter he raised both his own hands, shoulder-high, the palms toward Sanderson.

"So you know it means shootin', eh?" said Sanderson grimly as he stepped over the threshold and closed the door behind him, slamming it shut with his left hand.

"Well, shootin' goes." There was the cold calm of decision in his manner; his eyes were ablaze with the accumulated hate and rage that had been aroused over what he had heard. The grin that he showed to Dale drew his lips into two straight, stiff lines.

"I reckon you think you've earned your red shirt, Dale," he said, "for tellin' tales out of school. Well, you'll get it. There's just one thing will save your miserable hide. You got that seven thousand on you?"

Dale hesitated, then nodded.

Sanderson spoke to Mary Bransford without removing his gaze from Dale:

"Get pen, ink, an' paper."

The girl moved quickly into another room, returning almost instantly with the articles requested.

"Sit down an' write what I tell you to," directed Sanderson.

Dale dropped into a chair beside a center table, took up the pen, poised it over the paper, and looked at Sanderson.

"I am hereby returning to Deal Sanderson the seven thousand two hundred dollars I stole from him," directed Sanderson. "I am doing this of my own accord—no one is forcin' me," went on Sanderson. "I want to add that I hereby swear that the charge of drawin' a gun on Silverthorn was a frame-up, me an' Silverthorn an' Maison bein' the guilty parties," finished Sanderson.

"Now," he added, when Dale had written as directed, "sign it."

Dale signed and stood up, his face aflame with rage.

"I'll take the money—now," said Sanderson.

Dale produced it from various pockets, laying it on the table. He said nothing. Mary Bransford stood a little distance away, watching silently.

"Count it, Miss Bransford," said Sanderson when Dale had disgorged the money.

The two men stood silent as the girl fingered the bills. At last she looked at Sanderson and nodded.

The latter grinned. "Everything's regular, now," he said. He looked at Mary. "Do you want him killed, ma'am? He'd be a lot better off dead. You'd be better off, too. This kind of a skunk is always around, botherin' women—when there ain't no men around."

Mary shook her head with a decisive negative.

"Then he won't die, right now," said Sanderson. "He'll pull his freight away from the Double A, though, ma'am. An' he'll never come back."

He was talking to Dale through the girl, and Dale watched him, scowling.

"If he does come back, you'll tell me, won't you, ma'am? An' then there'll never be an Alva Dale to bother you again—or to go around robbin' honest men, an' tryin' to get them mixed up with the law."

And now he turned from the girl and spoke to Dale:

"You go right back to Okar an' tell Maison an' Silverthorn what has happened here to-night. Show them how the fear of

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God has got into your heart an' made you yearn to practise the principles of a square deal. Tell them that they'd better get to goin' straight, too, for if they don't there's a guy which was named after a square deal that is goin' to snuff them off this hemisphere middlin' rapid. That's all. You'd better hit the breeze right back to Okar an' spread the good news."

He stood, a grim smile on his face, watching Dale as the latter walked to the door. When Dale stepped out on the porch Sanderson followed him, still regarding the movements of the other coldly and alertly.

Mary heard them—their steps on the boards of the porch; she heard the saddle leather creak as Dale climbed on his horse; she heard the sound of the hoof-beats as the horse clattered out of the ranch-house yard.

And then for several minutes she stood near the little table in the room, listening vainly for some sound that would tell her of the presence of Sanderson on the porch. None came.

At last, when she began to feel certain that he had gone to the bunk-house, she heard a step on the porch and saw Sanderson standing in the doorway.

He grinned at her, meeting her gaze fairly.

"Dale told you a heap of truth, ma'am," he said. "I feel more like a man to-night than I've felt for a good many days—an' nights."

"Then it was true—as Dale said—that you are not my brother?" said the girl. She was trying to make her voice sound severe, but only succeeded in making it quaver.

"I ain't your brother."

"And you came here to try to take the ranch away from me—to steal it?"

He flushed. "You've got four thousand of my money there, ma'am. You're to keep it. Mebbe that will help to show what my intentions were. About the rest—your brother an' all—I'll have to tell you. It's a thing you ought to know, an' I don't know what's been keepin' me from tellin' you all along.

"Mebbe it was because I was scared you'd take it hard. But since these sneaks have got to waggin' their tongues it 'll have to be told. If you sit down by the table there, I'll tell you why I done what I did."

She took a chair beside the table and faced him, and, standing before her, speaking very gently, but frankly, he related what had occurred to him in the desert. She took it hard, and there were times when he had to halt his recital because of her emotion. But she soon became resigned to the death of her brother and was able to listen to Sanderson's story of his motive in deceiving her.

When he related his emotions during their first meeting—when he had told Dale that he was her brother, after yielding to the appeal in her eyes—she smiled.

"There was some excuse for it, after all," she declared.

"An' you ain't blamin' me—so much?" he asked.

"No," she said. She blushed as she thought of the times she had kissed him. He was thinking of her kisses, too, and as their eyes met, each knew what the other was thinking about. Sanderson smiled at her and her eyes dropped.

"It wasn't a square deal for me to take them, then, ma'am," he told her. "But I'm goin' to stay around here an' fight Dale an' his friends to a finish. That is, if you want me to stay. I'd like a straight answer. I ain't hangin' around where I ain't wanted."

Her eyes glowed as she looked at him. "You'll have to stay, now," she said. "Will is dead, and you will have to stay here and brazen it out. They'd take the Double A from me surely, if you were to desert me. You will have to stay and insist that you are my brother!"

"That's a contract," he agreed. "But"—he looked at her, a flush on his face—"goin' back to them kisses. It wasn't a square deal. But I'm hopin' that a day will come—"

She got up, her face very red. "It is nearly morning," she interrupted.

"Yes," he smiled; "things are only beginnin'."

"You are impudent—and imprudent," she said, looking straight at him.

"An' hopeful," he answered, meeting her eyes.

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Fifteen minutes later, stretched out on his bed, Sanderson saw the dawn breaking in the east. It reminded him of the morning he had seen the two riders above him on the edge of the arroyo. As on that other morning, he lay and watched the coming of the dawn. And when later he heard Mary moving about in the kitchen he got up, not having slept a wink, and went out to her.

"Did you sleep well?" she asked.

"How could I," he asked, "with a new day dawnin' for me?"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HAND OF THE ENEMY.

WHEN in the bunk-house the next morning Sanderson informed Barney Owen of what had occurred during the night, the latter looked fixedly at Sanderson.

"So she didn't take it hard," he said.

"Was you expectin' her to? For a brother that she hadn't seen in a dozen years—an' which she knows in her secret heart wasn't any good?" retorted Sanderson. "Shootin' your face off in Okar—or anywhere else—don't go any more," added Sanderson. "She's pretendin', publicly, that I'm her brother."

"I'm through talking," declared Owen.

"Or livin'. It's one or the other," warned Sanderson.

Sanderson took the seven thousand dollars that Mary gave him, rode to Lazette—a town fifty miles eastward from the basin—and deposited the money in a bank there. Then he rode eastward still farther and in another town discovered a young engineer with a grievance against his employers.

The result of this discovery was that on the following morning the young engineer and Sanderson journeyed westward to the basin, arriving at the Double A late in the afternoon of the next day.

On the edge of the plateau after the engineer and Sanderson had spent three or four days prowling through the basin and the gorge, the engineer spoke convincingly:

"It's the easiest thing in the world! A big flume to the point I showed you, a big main ditch and several laterals will do the trick. I'm with you to the finish!"

Sanderson smiled at the engineer's glowing enthusiasm and told him of the opposition he would meet in developing the project.

"There'll be a heap of schemin', an' mebbe shootin', Williams," Sanderson told him. "Puttin' through this deal won't be any pussy-kitten affair."

"So much the better," laughed the engineer; "I'm fed up on soft snaps and longing for action."

The engineer was thirty; big, square-shouldered, lithe, and capable. He had a strong face and a level, steady eye.

"If you mean business, let's get acquainted," he said. "My front name is Kent."

"Well, Kent, let's get busy," smiled Sanderson. "You go to work on your estimates, order your material, hire your men. I'll see how bad the people in the basin want the water they've been expectin'."

Kent Williams took up his quarters in the bunk-house and immediately began work, though before he could do much he rode to Okar, telegraphed to Dry Bottom, the town which had been the scene of his previous activity, and awaited the arrival of several capable-looking young men.

In company with the latter he returned to the Double A, and for many days thereafter he and his men ran the transit and drove stakes in the basin and along the gorge.

Sanderson did not spend all his time talking with the cattlemen in the basin. They were all eager to have water brought to their ranches, for it would save them the long trip to the river, which was inaccessible in many places, and they welcomed the new project.

One of the men—a newcomer to the basin—voiced the general sentiment:

"We want water, an' we don't give a damn who brings it here. First come, first served!"

The big problem to Sanderson, however, was the question of money. He was aware that a vast sum would be required. Nearly all the money he possessed would be sunk in the preliminary work, and he knew that if the work was to go on he must borrow money.

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He couldn't get money in Okar, he knew that. He rode to Lazette and talked with a banker there. The latter was interested, but unwilling to lend.

"The Okar Basin," he said. "Yes, I've heard about it. Great prospects there. But I've been told that Silverthorn and Maison are going to put it through, and until I hear from them, I shouldn't like to interfere."

"That gang won't touch the Double A water!" declared Sanderson. "I'll see the basin scorched to a cinder before I'll let them in on the deal!"

The banker smiled. "You are entitled to the water, of course; and I admire your grit. But those men are powerful. I have to depend on them a great deal. So you can see that I couldn't do anything without first consulting them."

Sanderson left Lazette in disgust. It was not until after he had tried in Dry Bottom and Las Vegas that he realized how subtle and far-reaching was the power and influence of the financial rulers of Okar.

"We should like to let you have the money," the Las Vegas banker told him. "But, unfortunately, a loan to you would conflict with our interests in Okar. We know the big men in Okar have been considering the water question in the basin, and we should not like to antagonize them."

The trip consumed two weeks, and Sanderson returned to the Double A to discover that during his absence very little work had been done.

"It looks like we're up against it," Williams informed him when pressed for an explanation. "We can't get a pound of material. I went personally to Okar and was told by Silverthorn that the railroad would accept no material consigned to the Double A ranch."

"Pretty raw," was Sanderson's only comment.

"Raw? It's rotten!" declared Williams. "There's plenty of the kind of material we want in Lazette. To get it here would mean a fifty-mile haul. I can get teams and wagons in Lazette," he added, an eager note in his voice.

"Go to it," said Sanderson.

Williams smiled admiringly. "You're game, Mr. Man," he said; "it's a pleasure to work for you!"

However, it was not courage that impelled Sanderson to accept the hazard and expense of the fifty-mile haul. In his mind during the days he had been trying to borrow money had been a picture of the defeat that was ahead of him if he did not succeed; he could imagine the malicious satisfaction with which his three enemies would discuss his failure.

Inwardly, Sanderson was writhing with impatience and consumed with an eagerness to get into personal contact with his enemies; the passion to triumph had gripped his soul, and a contempt for the sort of law in which Okar dealt had grown upon him until the contemplation of it had aroused in him a savage humor.

Okar's law was not law at all; it was a convenience under which his three enemies could assail the property rights of others.

Outwardly, Sanderson was a smiling optimist. To Mary Bransford he confided that all was going well.

Neither had broached the subject of Sanderson's impersonation since the night of Dale's visit. It was a matter which certain thoughts made embarrassing for Mary, and Sanderson was satisfied to keep silent.

But on the day that Williams left the Double A for Lazette, Mary's curiosity could not be denied. She had conquered that constraint which had resulted from the revelation of Sanderson's identity, and had asked him to ride to the top of the gorge, telling him she wanted him to explain the proposed system of irrigation.

"It is desperately hard to get any information out of Williams," she told Sanderson; "he simply won't talk about the work."

"Meanin' that he'll talk rapid enough about other things, eh?" Sanderson returned. He looked slyly at Mary.

"What other things are there for him to talk about?"

"A man could find a heap of things to talk about—to a woman. He might talk about himself—or the woman," suggested Sanderson, grinning.

She gave him a knowing look. "Oh," she

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said, reddening. "Yes," she added, smiling faintly; "now that you speak of it, I remember he did talk quite a little. He is a very interesting man."

"Good-lookin', too," said Sanderson; "an' smart. He saw the prospects of this thing right off."

"Didn't you see them?" she questioned quickly.

"Oh, that," he said, flushing. "If the drifter hadn't told me mebbe I wouldn't have seen."

"You have always been around cattle, I suppose?" she asked.

"Raised with them," smiled Sanderson.

Thus she directed the conversation to the subject about which she had wanted to inquire—his past life. Her questions were clever; they were suggestions to which he could do nothing except to return direct replies. And she got out of him much of his history, discovering that he had sound moral views, and a philosophy of which the salient principle was the scriptural injunction: "Do unto others as ye would that others should do unto you."

Upon that principle he had founded his character. His reputation had grown out of an adamantine adherence to it. Looking at him now she felt the strength of him, his intense devotion to his ideals; the earnestness of him.

Curiously, she had not felt those things during the time she had thought of him as her brother, nor had she been conscious of the lure of him. It gave her a queer thrill to stand beside him now, knowing that she had kissed him; that he had had an opportunity to take advantage of the situation, and had not done so.

He had acted the gentleman; he was a gentleman. That was why she was able to talk with him now. If he had not treated her as he had treated her his presence at the Double A would have been intolerable.

There was a deep respect for woman in Sanderson, she knew. Also, despite his bold, frank glances—which was merely the manhood of him challenging her and taking note of her charms—there was a hesitating bashfulness about the man, as though he was not quite certain of the impression he was creating in her mind.

That knowledge pleased Mary; it convinced her of his entire worthiness; it gave her power over him—and that power thrilled her.

As her brother, he had been an interesting figure, though his manner had repelled her. And she had been conscious of a subtle pleasure that was not all sisterly when she had been near him. She knew, now, that the sensation had been instinctive, and she wondered if she could have felt toward her brother as she felt toward this man.

However, this new situation had removed the diffidence that had affected her; their relations were less matter of fact and more romantic, and she felt toward him as any woman feels who knows an admirer pursues her—breathless with the wonder of it, but holding aloof, tantalizing, whimsical and uncertain of herself.

She looked at him challengingly, mockery in her eyes.

"So you came here because the drifter told you there would be trouble—and a woman. How perfectly delightful!"

He sensed her mood and responded to it. He grinned.

"It's sure delightful. But it ain't unusual. I've always heard that trouble will be lurkin' around where there's a woman."

"But you would not say that a woman is not worth the trouble she causes?" she countered.

"A man is willin' to take her—trouble an' all," he responded, looking straight at her.

"Yes—if he can get her!" she shot back at him.

"Mostly every woman gets married to a man. I've got as good a chance as any other man."

"How do you know?"

"Because you're talkin' to me about it," he grinned. "If you wasn't considerin' me you wouldn't argue with me about it; you'd turn me down cold an' forget it."

"I suppose when a man is big and romantic-looking—"

"Oh, shucks, ma'am; you'll be havin' me gettin' a swelled head."

"He thinks that all he has to do is to look his best."

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"I expect I've looked my worst since I've been here. I ain't had a chance to do any moonin' at you."

"I don't like men that 'moon,'" she declared.

"That's the reason I didn't do it," he declared.

She laughed. "Now, tell me," she asked, "how you got your name, 'Deal.' It had something to do with cards, I suppose?"

"With weight," he said, looking soberly at her. "When I was born my dad looked at me sort of nonplused. I was that big. 'There's a deal of him,' he told my mother. An' the name stuck. That ain't a lot mysterious."

"It was a convenient name to attach the 'square' to," she said.

"I've earned it," he said earnestly. "An' I've had a mighty hard time provin' my right to wear it. There's men that will tempt you out of pure deviltry, an' others that will try to shoot such a fancy out of your system. But I didn't wear the 'square' because I wanted to—folks hung it onto me without me askin'. That's one reason I left Tombstone; I'd got tired of posin' as an angel."

He saw her face grow thoughtful and a haunting expression come into her eyes.

"You haven't told me how he looked," she said.

Sanderson lied. He couldn't tell her of the dissipation he had seen in her brother's face, nor of the evilness that had been stamped there. He drew a glowing picture of the man he had buried, and told her that had he lived her brother would have done her credit.

But Sanderson suffered no remorse over the lie. For he saw her eyes glow with pride, and he knew that the picture he had drawn would be the ideal of her memory for the future.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TRAIL-HERD.

KENT WILLIAMS went to Lazette, and Sanderson spent the interval during his departure and return in visiting the cattlemen and settlers in the basin. The result of these visits was a sheaf of contracts for water, the charge based on acreage, that reposed in Sanderson's pockets. According to the terms of the contracts signed by the residents of the basin Sanderson was to furnish water within one year.

The length of time, Sanderson decided, would tell the story of his success or failure. If he failed he would lose nothing, because of having the contracts with the settlers, and if he won the contracts would be valid.

Sanderson was determined to win. When after an absence of a week Williams returned, to announce that he had made arrangements for the material necessary to make a "regular" start, and that he had hired men and teams to transport the material, Sanderson's determination became grim. For Williams told him that he had "gone the limit," which meant that every cent to Sanderson's credit in the Lazette bank had been pledged to pay for the material the engineer had ordered.

"We're going to rush things from now on," Williams told Sanderson. "Next week we'll need ten thousand dollars, at least."

Sanderson went into the house and had a long talk with Mary Bransford. Coming out, he went to the corral, saddled Streak, and rode to Okar.

Shortly he was sitting at a desk opposite a little man who was the resident-buyer for an Eastern live-stock company.

"The Double A has three thousand head of cattle," Sanderson told the little man. "They've had good grass and plenty of water. They're fat, an' are good beef cattle. Thirty-three dollars is the market price. What will you give for them, delivered to your corral here?"

The resident-buyer looked uncomfortable. "I've had orders not to buy any more cattle for a time."

"Whose orders?" demanded Sanderson.

The resident-buyer's face flushed and he looked more uncomfortable.

"My firm's orders!" he snapped.

Sanderson laughed grimly; he saw guilt in the resident-buyer's eyes.

"Silverthorn's orders," he said shortly. At the other's emphatic negative Sanderson laughed again. "Maison's, then. Sure

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—Maison's," he added, as the other's flush deepened.

Sanderson got up. "Don't take it so hard," he advised the resident-buyer. "I ain't goin' to bite you. What I'm wonderin' is, did Maison give you that order personally, or did you get it from your boss."

The buyer shifted uneasily in his chair, and did not look at Sanderson.

"Well," said the latter, "it don't make a heap of difference. Good-by," he said, as he went out. "If you get to feelin' mighty small an' mean you can remember that you're only one of the pack of coyotes that's makin' this town a disgrace to a dog-kennel."

Sanderson returned to the Double A and found Mary in the house.

"No go," he informed her. "Maison an' Silverthorn an' Dale have anticipated that move. We don't sell any cattle in Okar."

The girl's disappointment was deep.

"I suppose we may as well give up," she said.

Sanderson lifted her face to his.

"If you're goin' to talk that way I ain't goin' to love you like I thought I was," he grinned. "An' I'm sure wantin' to."

"I don't want to give up," she said.

"Meanin'?"

"Meaning that I'd like to have you beat those men. Oh, the miserable schemers! They will go to any length to defeat you."

He laughed lowly and vibrantly. "Well, they'll certainly have to travel *some*," he said. "About as fast as the man will have to travel that takes you away from me."

"Is victory that dear to you?" she asked.

"I won't take one without the other," he told her, his eyes glowing. "If I don't beat Silverthorn and the others, an' keep the Double A for you, why I—"

"You'll win!" she said.

"You are hopin' I will?" he grinned. "Well," he added, as she averted her eyes, "there'll come a time when we'll talk real serious about that. I'm goin' to tell the range boss to get ready for a drive to Las Vegas."

"That is a hundred and seventy-five miles!" gasped the girl.

"I've followed a trail-herd two thousand," grinned Sanderson.

"You mean that you will go yourself —with the outfit?"

"Sure."

Sanderson went out, mounted Streak, and found the range boss — Eli Carter. Carter and the men were ordered to round up all the Double A cattle and get ready to drive them to Las Vegas. Sanderson told Carter he would accompany the outfit.

Cutting across the basin toward the ranch-house he saw another horseman riding fast to intercept him, and he swerved Streak and headed toward the other.

The rider was Williams, and when Sanderson got close enough to see his face he noted that the engineer was pale and excited.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

WHEN SLEIGH-BELLS CHIMED©

JUST you and I sleigh-riding—the snow
A curtain around us flung;
How your curls across my face would blow
When down the curves we swung;

And you were so near, so brightly aglow!
How lips met, and soft arms clung—
Just you and I sleigh-riding—the snow
A curtain around us flung!

Ah me, once more the joy to know
Which of old through my pulses sung!
You are grandma now; but let us go
And play at being young,
Just you and I sleigh-riding—the snow
A curtain around us flung!

Stokely S. Fisher.

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Experience is Everything

by Raymond S. Spears

THE son, Jean, was very tired and discouraged; the daughter-in-law, Marie, was tired and thoughtful; the little children, of whom there were four, played many games restlessly and fretfully. In the corner, between the big sheet-iron wood-stove and the two walls sat Daddy Jeadreau, tired—not with a day's toil like the young people, but tired because he was old and had done a man's work during a lifetime in the wilderness. The fatigue of sixty years was on his shoulders, and he was patient, observant, silent.

Old Jeadreau's chair was a great rocker which had drifted up on the North Shore, and on the wooden seat was a thick mattress which had moose hide for cover, and was stuffed full of feathers, duck, goose, partridge, and other bird-down till it was as thick and springy as a newly laid balsam bough bed.

In that old chair sat the old man dreaming, and his dreams were memories of toils he had undergone and the jeopardies he had braved; he looked back on his youth and saw its trials in perspective, and so he knew the trials that these young people were undergoing, and he smiled in his heart because they, too, were brave, and they did not know it.

They were fronting just such difficulties as he had faced; they had the impatience of youth, its inexperience, its questionings of the unkind assaults made upon their comfort, and the inexplicable failures of the most ardent efforts.

The old man could remember his own youth, and its precious strength and the joy undying of loving a confident wife, working out destinies together—their own destinies, and setting their young children firmly on the way into prosperity of the soul, if not greatly in material riches. His wife was dead; all the children were grown up, except two or three who were dead; but Jean survived, and old Jeadreau was proud of him, for he was big and strong and impatient, like his father—tearing with ambition, but like his mother, loving little children and loving his father and loving his own wife, whose tongue was sometimes impatient, but what wife ever lived who would not grow impatient with the stolid thick-headedness of men?

"Jean!" she exclaimed. "Don't you see that heater is going out? And why couldn't you put in some dry maple before that cooking fire got so low that the potpie stopped cooking?"

Just so she talked to Jean and to the children, and old Jeadreau leaned back in his comfort, with his eyes quite closed, listening as to an echo of his own youthful days when he did not understand Mammee, the way he would understand her now, if, with his experience, she could be alive with him and he be young again.

Ah—those blessed little children which, if they do not die and become angels, grow up into strong boys and fine young men, so like their fathers, not inheriting much knowledge or instinct about girls and wo-

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men, but so willing to learn! And how wise the girls are, even little ones—and Marie? She was so lovely, and old Jeadreau dreamed wistfully, remembering the little girl—his only daughter, who was dead, but who might have grown up like Marie!

"You children, stop that noise! Go outdoors! It's a pretty day! Go out, I tell you!"

The thoughtless little tribe ran out, waiting near the door because the potpie was sweet-savored, and it was almost done, and it was a rabbit one, with two great white rabbits, which Daddy had brought in from the line.

Jean watched his wife anxiously, for he had only the day before returned from his line of traps down toward Oiseau Bay. Luck had not been very good. For two weeks' tramping he had caught one twelve-dollar-fisher, two five-dollar-mink, and some fifty-cent ermines, and something had lugged away four dollars' worth of traps, which he did not dare tell about.

It seemed pitiful, twenty dollars net, for two weeks' work in the best trapping time! Would all the winter be like that? And if next trip was not good, how about the Christmas presents?

Jean had much to think about, and his wife, praying for just one silver fox, not a big one—but a three-hundred-dollar fox, or a five-hundred-dollar, or even a hundred-dollar one! If only God would grant them one week without that steady, that constant pressure upon shoulders and soul and hope itself!

"Maybe we catch a black fox next trip!" Jean exclaimed with that strange fatuity of mankind.

"You think you could catch a thousand-dollar-fox!" She turned on him, her faith weakening, or seeming to weaken, in her man's skill and luck. "*You* catch a black fox! Indeed not—not you! Not anybody in this house could catch a fox like that! You get fifty-cent weasels, and perhaps not that much, because all yellow-spotted. And you wait till spring to catch mink, because then the skin is shaggy and the hair worn and the fur faded! That's the way you do—and I married *you!*"

Half in his dreams old Jeadreau heard Marie's plaint. Half it was in memory, too, for he transported himself back into his own young manhood when his pretty little wife had spurred him, Jeadreau, just so! She had helped him thus. She had driven him thus, sometimes, but not often now that he recalled it. Not nearly as often as he deserved! And, oh, how it had hurt!

"But it was best so!" he mumbled under his breath. "Only poor Jean, he feels now all discouraged the way I did. No! He could not catch a black fox. One must know the black fox's track, and he must follow it and then head it off and put the trap cunningly where the paw will step. One time I caught the trick. *Mon père* could not tell me—no! I had to learn it myself. Then we had black foxes for ten years. Ah, Mammee! Those happy, prosperous years, and she died in our happiness. Tired, the doctor said; because God willed it so, the priest said, lest we be too happy! Well—"

So the old man mused, half listening, and he pitied the children as only an old, old man can pity the young. He thought, too, if only he had just a little more than the hundred dollars, which was saved up to bury him, and to pay the priest, who had comforted, and to pay the doctor who helped him through the agonies. Well, then?

The old man started where he sat. He opened wide his eyes for a minute, and at first his sunken cheeks flushed and then turned pale.

"Yes," he mused, closing his eyes again, "I am very, very old, and I am worn out. What good am I now? If I could only tell Jean—how it would please Marie, who has been so patient with me. Never a word to me! I know that trick of the black fox, which only old men learn, because they know that the black fox is inbred and stupid, but cunning! I know his walk, his track! My eyes are not so very dim!"

Jean had described his trap-line down the east coast; how well old Jeadreau recalled the ridges of stone, the bleak coast of red rock, the slim, green timber, and the old, old runways beaten down by ten thousand years of hoofs and paws, rarely by moccasins.

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In two days Jean went on his way again. It was fair weather; he said he would go down the east coast line, from cabin to cabin, clear to Twin Falls River; then he would strike up the river into the mid-wilderness, and home through the back country, over the great loop of one hundred and fifty miles of line—two long weeks of tramping, fixing traps, snow-shoeing, and ever wondering about wolves and trees that fall unexpectedly, and of places where one might trip and break a leg.

The father moved about slowly. He fondled his old rifle occasionally. He played with the children more than ever during the three days that followed. He walked out, two or three times, into the balsam swamp down the railroad, saying that he was trying to kill a rabbit.

Marie scolded him.

"We've lots of rabbits! You've done enough running around. Suppose you should fall?"

"An old man steps slowly and he does not fall!" old Jeadreau smiled over her solicitude. "Don't worry about me!"

He watched the weather with care. He studied the sky morning, noon, and night. It seemed to him as though he had never known so much fair weather in his life, and he complained of it to Marie and to the children, while he showed the two boys how to set a snare that a squirrel would not spring, but a white hare would romp into with blind delight.

"A storm! A soft snow! Suppose we had one?" Marie demanded. "There's Jean—out on the line, and tramping so far!"

"It would be worse if he was old!" Jeadreau apologized. "That's so—I'd forgotten; loose snow would be hard tramping for him!"

Then a nor'wester growled down out of the wilderness. Gray clouds swept by, low-hanging and dull; the snow sprinkled and the dusty crust disappeared under a clean, white mantle.

One minute the old man was in his corner, musing and mumbling as always; the next minute he was gone. Marie, busy with her children, could not tell just what occurred. It was some time before she even noticed. Then she did not wonder much about it.

At dinner-time she called the children in, and they burst through the doorway, bringing snow on their caps and drifts on their feet, their mittens frozen and their cheeks red as moose-meat.

"Grandpa!" she called into his room. "Grandpa!"

There was no reply.

"He said he got to fix one of those rabbit-snares!" little Jeadreau said.

"What! He's gone out, just before dinner, and he knew dinner was ready to go on the table. Oh—men!"

They finished the dinner; she kept some of it warm in the oven most of the afternoon; she sent the two boys out to look in the swamp to find grandaddy. Night fell and he had not returned.

In alarm she sent the boys up to the store, and three men went out to search for him in the screaming blizzard. In the morning they hunted far and wide, but it was still snowing, and they could find no trail in any direction.

Meanwhile some strange discoveries were made in the little four-room cabin. The old man had taken his rifle with him; he had, of course, worn his snow-shoes, an old and faithful pair of bows which had outlasted moose, caribou, heifer, none knew how many kinds of rawhide webbings—newly strung that fall. His old leather pack, his old rabbit-skin blanket, his little cooking equipment of pail, frying-pan, plate, cup, and such things were all missing.

The storekeeper, when he thought about it, remembered that old Jeadreau had bought tea, bacon, and other supplies.

"What's he up to?" some asked. "He's too old to go traipsing around the winter woods. He can never stand it!"

One day was like another; whoever went into the woods kept his eye open for sign of the man who had wandered away; in the little cabin the children stared at the empty rocking-chair with awe, and when their mother's quick footsteps over the board floor tipped the planks and made the chair swing back and forth, they fled from it in ecstasy of terror.

Their manner was subdued, and the two

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boys played at finding grandaddy; the girls cried and hugged the little dolls the old hands had carved out of funny roots and knobs of branches.

Jean returned from his line in nine days. He had hurried over it, his heart beating swiftly with hope. He had started with jubilant certainty that now would fall upon him the good luck for which he had prayed and in which he had believed. From Pic to White Mud; from Gulls to Wolf-Paw; from Oiseau to White Gravel; from White Spruce to English Fishery—across Swallow and up Twin Falls River, he found in his traps the tails of red squirrels, the tiny carcasses of yellow-stained ermine; a slim little marten, a little black mink, a pup red fox, a badly cut-up fisher, evidently one that had been fighting a wolf.

Right through to the last trap he carried his hopes, but when his whole line had been covered he stopped at the edge of the timber and blinked back tears of disappointment; he foresaw his wife's dejection; his father must question his skill and energy; the children alone would scream with joy and reckon each tiny pelt a prize from the gods of fortune!

"Ah, the children pay — the children pay!" Jean shook his head. "If I could only clothe them as she would have them!"

All that he had expected was missing from the greeting he received. Not one glance to learn what luck this time! Marie threw herself into his arms and wept upon his shoulders; the children cried aloud.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "What—"

With one accord they pointed at the empty rocking-chair.

"Dead!" he gasped, for the thought that his father might die seldom bothered him.

This man, who had accompanied him through all his life, had cared for him, trained him, nourished him, given him his first bow, his first trap, his first rifle—upon whom he had leaned all his life for advice and for comfort and encouragement, to whom he had looked forward to this very day like a child hoping not to be blamed too much. Dead?

"He went away. He took his rifle—pack—everything—"

"Track him?" Jean demanded.

"No—that northwester. Just that day he went off the minute the storm began!"

"Ah!" Jean gasped. "To let it hide his trail! He thought—"

"Oh, Jean! Did he go because I—because I was hateful! Honest, Jean, I never said a word to *him!*"

"Never mind, Veerie! Daddy's old—he knows the woods! Oh, if I knew them the way he does! He just—he just wanted to go into the green timber again—I know! I know good old Daddy!"

The splendid confidence of the son soothed all those others who could not possibly know him so well. They sat down to dinner.

Quietly they ate, and not till they were all through did Marie or any of them think of the luck on the line.

"About—perhaps I'll get eighteen dollars—only nine days! It is fair wages—fine!"

"Where do you suppose he went?" Marie whispered. "It's five days now—"

"I'll have to think." Jean shook his head. "It's hard telling!"

He went to the rocking-chair and sat in it, and smoked his pipe so much like his father that Marie smiled through her tears—it was the old man grown young again. It was the son grown up and matured and growing wise, inspired by the atmosphere in which his father had lived.

She smiled wistfully, and in her own soul was a feeling she had never had before. Old Jeadreau had always pretended he didn't like children—and how he had loved and defended Jean! How he had played with her own young ones! How he had tried to please her, and keep out of her way. Now she wondered if he had thought that perhaps he troubled her, adding to her burden?

All that afternoon Jean sat there thinking. He was a woodsman; he was a reader of animal trails; he knew the lay of the land; he had hunted, trapped, traveled with his father tens of hundreds of miles through the wilderness. Where would the old man go?

Jean slept on the question that night, and before dawn he built the fire in the kitchen

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stove; before daybreak he was in his pack, with his light rifle in hand, his ax in its sheath, ready to go forth and strap on his snow-shoes.

"I've an idea," he whispered to Marie, so as not to awaken the children, "I'll be gone about three days, maybe four—"

"Oh, Jean! Come back for Christmas—for Christmas Eve! Be sure!"

"That's five days—sure!"

Jean went out into the little balsam swamp, an island of woods left when a railroad fire burned over the wilderness there. He left the swamp on the southeast side and headed toward the low ridge of stone, rounded by glaciers an age ago, and followed down the east side out of the blow of the west zero wind. He was glad to enter the big woods across the Pic River.

There he turned into the green timber, and tramped uncertainly along, studying the lay of the land and looking at all the trees, watching the snow, looking at the chickadees and blue jays that flocked down around him, for company's sake.

"That old camp must be up this brook somewhere," he mused. "I'll go there. It's likely. Let's see! I haven't been here in ten—twenty years! His old cabin—"

He could just remember—he recognized a bluff of rock; he remembered a bush of maples, ten or twelve acres, where his father had said he made sugar one spring. From there on the way was easy. The camp was a great leaning boulder, and his father had built it up in the old days with logs for sides and a big fireplace in front, all housed in. He went up to the place biting his lips.

Sure enough!

"I know old Daddy!" he whispered. "Oh, I know him!"

The sides of the old camp had long since rotted down, but the stone fireplace remained. On either side were stacked up green limbs of spruce and balsam, freshly cut. All around it were tracks nearly buried in the snow. There was even some dry kindlings, some extra wood back under the rock to insure starter for a fire for the next comer.

Jean did not touch that dry wood. Instead, he cut some for himself, and brewed a can of tea and ate a broil of rabbit leg and bread for lunch. He circled around the camp, and found a snowed-in trail leading toward the southeast.

It was a snow-shoe track, and Jean would have enjoyed following it through the deep snow, if he had not worried about what he might find at the end of that faint trace.

Always Jean had to worry! Always he had to feel the dread of what might happen! That is the way of young men. He swung with long strides along the trail. Half a mile from the camp he stopped short with a loud exclamation.

There was a trap-cubby, built up prettily with sides of old wood and top of balsam boughs, and with its back against a gaunt hardwood stub. Out to one side reached up the well-sweep pole, resting in the forks of a sapling. The trap had been sprung, and dangling in mid air was a splendid big fisher, frozen and stark.

"The old Indian!" Jean laughed, taking the fisher and resetting the trap. "He couldn't keep out of the woods!"

Half a mile farther, in a gap in the stone ridge, there was another trap, and a beautiful marten was in it. Through that gap was a runway of the wilderness creatures. A trap there couldn't help but catch something.

Jean laughed, but flushed uneasily, too, for he had run his own line all around this region, having chosen his own trapping country. His father had never commented on that fact—had he?

Then Jean did recall that his father had said he preferred a shorter line and wild-rose petal line-loops around the camps instead of a far swing or circle clear around the country.

"You get to know all the animals in a small territory," old Jeadreau had said.

Jean remembered this now as he saw the blaze-marks made by his father thirty, forty, perhaps fifty years ago. No, it could not be fifty years, because he had not learned about short lines till he had been trapping quite a while, and had to meet weariness with craft.

Jean hurried on. There were traps that did not contain victims. There were traps, however, that yielded more fur. There was

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a second camp on the line—a spruce-bough camp in the depths of a wilderness. What effort it must have required for those ancient limbs to toil through that snow!

The trail was now plain, for it had been made since the storm. It led over the trap-line of the aged man's younger days, but not exactly. Sometimes it took a new course through the woods, and on such by-ways Jean found traps in places that looked strange to him.

Instead of cubbies, the traps were under rock overhangs, or under trees that had fallen, or in a hollow stump. The tracks the setter had made in the snow were covered over, and no sign of a human appeared within yards of the bait-lures.

Jean would have missed many of these traps had not each one been marked by a fresh staggered blaze on a tree within two or three rods. His eyes thus sharpened, he found the traps and sometimes fur in them.

Thus the trap line led into the wilderness depths, and sometimes there was a trap every half-mile, but in other parts of the line there were two-mile gaps without a trap anywhere. Every few miles was a little brush shack. The trail led into a perfect tumult and jumble of rocky hills and interspersed streams with pools and lakes surrounded by dense swamps.

Jean had never seen this country. Wherever he turned he noted tracks of fur in the snow, lynx along the stone cliffs, marten among the knoll top-tree clumps, mink and otter along the streams, and fisher in whatever direction he turned. More than all the other tracks were foxes. He saw them! He shot a big red one with his bait rifle; and every trap he found contained a fur, for every trap had been put with a great temptation at the crossroads of the wilderness.

In this land the old man's track disappeared. It circled around and down into the deep woods and up over the bare ridges of stone, where the wind had swept the rocks bare, leaving only scales of ice and clods of frozen moss. In vain Jean tried to find the snow-shoe trail! He circled around and around, finding new tracks, but invariably they led into tracks he had already discovered.

He did find, however, the cave in which the old man had spent two or three nights. That accounted for the circling tracks, for the lost trails. Jean camped there one night. In the morning a gale was roaring among the stones and trees, bringing down drifts of snow.

The son set forth in the storm, circling up and down, but he could find no further signs of his father. He returned to the cave, and, after cooking a rabbit, started westward, which would take him out of the broken land. He crossed old tracks which he thought were his father's, but he could not be sure. He went on until he struck one of his own trap-line cabins.

It was a little log hut in the bottom of a ravine. It contained a thick rabbit-skin blanket, cooking outfit, some extra traps, a supply of food. As he entered it he looked around curiously.

Everything seemed to be exactly as he left it—blanket, tea can, frying-pan, pail. Yet something seemed displaced — he puzzled over the question, but could make nothing of it. It was as though there was some one just around the corner, just under the bunk. As the wood in the corner had not been touched, he knew it was all imagination.

In the morning, when he followed the trap line homeward, worrying about his father, thinking what perils the old man must be undergoing, he found the loose snow a puzzle to him. He stepped in his old tracks, but, somehow, he could not quite catch his own stride. He had never noticed that feeling before, except when following some other man on snow-shoes.

He forgot his wonder when, on rounding the point of a hill, he saw dangling in one of his own traps a magnificent black fox—a great, glossy fellow, dead where he swung on a long well-sweep.

"A black fox—a black fox!" he gasped. "A thousand, two thousand dollars!"

The animal was frozen stiff, and he took it out and reset the trap in the cubby. He marveled to think that any black fox should venture into a cubby, but counted it against the animal's hunger and against the fact that the brute probably had never seen or smelled a man.

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He hurried on with the pelt. He romped through the woods. He gave way only now and then to the depression he felt because of the mystery of his father. What short steps the old man had taken; what short distances apart had been the night-camps!

Jean ran out into the open across Pic River. He hurried homeward. He saw the blue smoke of his cabin from afar. He saw his children at play in the snow on the side-hill. His first steps were quick, but later his snow-shoes dragged. How could he report his failure to find grandaddy?

With the frozen black fox on his shoulder, stark and carefully wrapped to prevent rubbing the exquisite fur, he tramped across the open toward the house. He dreaded the moment of his arrival. He was afraid of what it would bring him!

"He's such a good old Daddy! I wish—"

"Hi-i-i! Whe-e-e-e!" Cries and screams were borne to his ears by the frosting winds. At last the children had seen him! The boy Jeadreau raced ahead of the others, running lightly on barrel-stave skiis.

"Hi-i!" young Jeadreau called to the others. "Daddy's got some fur! Daddy caught a black fox. Grandaddy bet he would!"

Jean let the children carry the fine carcass in. They handled it with every care. Marie met Jean at the doorway, and, after one look at the burden of the children, she began to cry—tears of happiness!

"I didn't find Daddy!" Jean faltered.

"Why, he's come back. He's here!"

"You bet, sonny, he's here!" the high voice of the old figure starting stiffly up from the big rocking-chair cackled. "What luck? Did you run the traps I set on my old line?"

"Yes, there's three fisher, seven marten, nine mink, and two lynx in your fur, Daddy!"

"'Rah fer Christmas, eh, boy!" the old man laughed, with a glance at the black fox, adding, "Did you set the traps again?"

"Sure I did!"

"And coming in—what luck—your line, I mean?"

"A black fox, Daddy!"

"I knowed it! I said he would, didn't I, kidlets? I said he would, didn't I?" The old prophet grinned, turning his eyes the other way.

"He did—he did!" the children shouted.

"You don't mind—you wouldn't mind, if yer old Daddy skins 'im? I kinda want to skin a black rascal agin. My hand 'll be stiddy—mayn't I?"

"Why, of course, if you want to bother!"

"Bother—bother—to skin a three-thousand-dollar black fox! Aye! A big bother that 'll be!"

Then the old man carefully thawed the carcass, and he sharpened his little old skinning blade, working in the warm corner of the room by the heater-stove. He slit the hind legs skin, worked it off, paws and all, right up to the back of the neck. There he stopped when a slightest tinge of dark discoloration showed. He carried the carcass out into the woodshed and quickly cut out the neck, ears, eyes, and jaws.

As he worked he grinned. With great care he cleaned the blister out of the back of the fox's neck, where a club had landed and killed the brute. Jean had found it stark and dead! The old Daddy was happy in the happiness of the children—children and grandchildren. It was their fox, their success—a greater success than any old Jeadreau remembered having enjoyed himself!

"Kinda funny 'bout dat!" old Jeadreau, sly woodsman, chuckled to himself. "Dat fox-break has neck hung up by de fore-paw! Well, lots an' lots of t'ings fer young fellers to learn back der in dem beeg woods. But dey learn, all right. Marie got a mighty good man. He got a fine woman, good-hearted girl, all right. I can be proud, too. He track his old Daddy all the way round, not know if I was too ole to wallow in de loose snow. By golly, pretty stiff in my ole j'ints! But I take de short line an' trap heem strong! Bettaire dan a long line on'y half trapped. Dem young fellers don' know dat—they have yet to learn, but, by an' by, like me, day'll know with much satisfaction."

When he carried the fur in, with a fox-stretcher board, his children and grandchildren were planning Christmas. Ah, what a Christmas their black fox would give them, and something for old Jeadreau, too!

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The Potter at the Wheel

by Mary Imlay Taylor

Author of "A Candle in the Wind," etc.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LOOPHOLE IN THE WALL.

KEVORK the potter had found it hard to understand Abdul's motives in aiding his escape. He had even been so suspicious of the boy at first that he had hesitated to take advantage of the opportunity; he thought he was being led into a trap. But after a while he reflected that any trap would be as good as the one he was already in.

Therefore, he had followed Abdul. It had ended in his freedom with his pocket neatly picked and large chances of recapture at every step. Besides, Kevork was a big man and found it hard to conceal his great length and breadth in any brushwood. He had no horse and no money; he must tramp the roadside or perish quickly for want of food.

It was a long journey and a cruel one. Half-way he saw a melancholy procession in the highroad and hid himself. His own people—women and children and old men—were being driven by the Turkish soldiers, whip in hand.

Kevork watched them with a curse in his heart. Children — very small, he thought, as he looked from his hidden place of observation—hobbled on swollen feet. Women dropped by the roadside, were flogged by the soldiers, and rose and crept on again. Hungry and blistered by the midday sun, he watched them until they were mere black specks in the distance. On every road to the desert the exiles were going steadily, miserably, hopelessly.

Kevork shaded his eyes with his big hand and saw, far off, like black specters in the yellow sky, the wheeling forms of the vultures. He knew now what they trailed, and shuddered.

"Vessels of wrath!" he muttered. "How long, O Lord, will Thou suffer them? Break them, O Lord, the Great Potter; break them in Thy wrath and in Thy mercy!"

But nothing happened, though the potter prayed with his whole heart and with a faith that might have removed mountains. Nothing happened, but a little later he found the trail. It was much trodden with many feet and, here and there, the footsteps were in blood.

A little way farther on he found a young Armenian woman, a mother, dead with her new-born babe dead beside her. There was no one near, but Kevork beat away a jackal. Then he carried the poor young body and laid it under the shelter of a rock and covered it as best he could with branches and loose earth and stones.

He did not pray this time; he could not. He went on, stumbling a little, for he was tired and very hungry. It was late afternoon when he found a dead man who had worn a Turkish fez and something of Turk-

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ish dress. Kevork took what he could, stained his own face with berries, and put on the fez. It changed him more than he knew; he looked more like a Turk than ever. But he was very hungry, and he was no longer sure of his road.

Walking backward and forward to avoid danger had puzzled him; he tried to clear his brain and found his thoughts hazy. He was in this state when he fell in with a caravan. The camels were laden with cotton and bound toward Constantinople.

Kevork fell in with the drivers and got food in exchange for his help. An old Arab was in charge, and he took scant notice of the newcomer. He was in trouble about his camel-drivers; one had dropped by the wayside and been left there, after the fashion of the Turks, to get well or perish, as it pleased Allah.

Kevork could drive camels; he had done so many times as a boy. Thus it happened, as a camel-driver, Kevork the Armenian, finally entered Constantinople, unsuspected and unquestioned. On the way he had seen sights so cruel that there were new white hairs on his forehead, and his face was seamed; he looked like an old man, and walked with bowed shoulders. But he was safe for a time.

The thunder of the Allied guns still filled the ears, and mobs were fighting in Stamboul, clamoring for peace through fear. The streets, too, were full of soldiers, the wounded coming back, the new men going out to the trenches. Heat and noise and foul air, Kevork hated it all, yet he thought he might find a way out of it here, providing he was unsuspected.

He trimmed his beard and used a little of the money from camel-driving to buy more Turkish clothes; presently all signs of the Armenian had disappeared, and he looked like a Stamboul porter, not indeed the Kurd, but the Turk from Asia Minor. He had counted on this in his dress and, so far, he had succeeded.

He wandered about, picking up what work he could, and waiting. For what he scarcely knew himself, unless it was the fulfilment of his curse, the fall of Constantinople. And it had seemed so near once! He watched fears blanch their faces as the wounded poured in, and prayed again, bleakly and fiercely, that the vessels of wrath might be broken!

He was in a mood that gloated over their misfortunes when he sat down in a doorway, on one of the nameless crooked streets, and watched the soldiers, muddy and bloody, limping back from the trenches. He had seen men in that uniform lashing Armenians on the road to the desert, and he sat there, chin sunk in hands, and cursed them silently, one by one, as they passed. There were not many, only a score or so, limping to the hospital.

At the rear, one came alone, stumbling as he walked, a young fellow half drenched in mud, his head bent. He was bareheaded, and in the pitless sun Kevork saw his face plainly, saw it with amazed eyes.

At first he thought that suffering and anxiety had turned his own brain, that he dreamed dreams and saw visions; then conviction came, and he rose and stepped out into the street. The other soldiers had almost turned the corner, a few curious stragglers followed them, Kevork and the wounded man were alone.

The potter planted himself midway in the street and fixed a stern gaze on the haggard, boyish face. The soldier stopped limping, pulled himself together and glanced around furtively; he looked like a man bent on flight; then he saw Kevork, and he, too, stood at gaze. There was an instant of breathless silence, and then the potter almost shouted:

"Mesrob!"

The young Armenian turned deathly pale and caught at Kevork's sleeve.

"Be still," he whispered; "in God's name, be still!"

The potter, infected with Mesrob's terror, started and looked over his shoulder, too. What is it the French say? The eyes of the enemy are everywhere! Admirable truth. Kevork felt it; he was sure that eyes watched from behind those latticed windows and ears listened against those silent walls. But he threw a supporting arm around Mesrob, he believed the boy was badly wounded; he seemed bloody and weak. It was a good move, too, for it brought them closer together.

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"Hold me up," Mesrob whispered, "I will hobble—so! Now we may get to your lodgings—if you've got any—I must see you."

Kevork smiled grimly; he had done some work for the keeper of a khan in one of the suburbs. The man let him sleep there in the courtyard. But there was a stable behind, little used now, for all the horses had been commandeered for the war. They might talk there, but—if Mesrob was really wounded—

"Can you walk so far?" he asked hoarsely, supporting him.

"I'm only feigning," Mesrob answered, and dragged a leg, seeing some officers riding along another street.

Between limping and dodging, they journeyed slow, but at last Kevork got him inside the old courtyard. Soldiers were in the house, but the stable was empty and thither the two Armenians stumbled.

It was dark inside, ill-smelling, and heaped in one corner with moldy straw. Mesrob sank down on this, drawing his knees up and clasping them with his arms. A little light filtered through from the door and showed his white face and the potter's big frame. Kevork glared at the uniform, worn and ragged though it was, and at the cartridge-belt.

"How came you here, boy?" he growled harshly, "and in these clothes?"

Mesrob passed his hand wearily over his eyes.

"It's a long story, Kevork," he said sadly. "I was captured—half-way to Mersina. They talk of an Armenian rebellion to help the Allies. It's only a way to break us; they're going to scatter us and murder us one by one. Massacres make too much fuss. As for me, I was ablebodied, I could be forced to fight. Here I am, then, digging in their trenches.

"At first I was half mad, thinking of you all, of Filore, of my mother, driven out into the desert to die, as they turn out their old horses and their camels! I've heard them tell of things that have happened already. I was going mad, I think, there in the trenches, and then—one day—I knew I mustn't go mad, I must be sane to save her. You know"—he bent over and laid his hand on Kevork's arm—"you know she's here—here in a harem?"

"Who?" Kevork thought the boy mad.

"Filore—Filore Marsovan."

"You're ill," said the potter soothingly, laying a quieting hand on his shoulder; "you're fever-sick, Mesrob. Filore is still with her grandfather. They have been ordered to leave the village, all of them. I was to have been punished there, but a boy let me loose, paid, so he said, by an American who was there, a troublesome fellow, I thought, for all that, but he knew your uncle, Khorene, and he did me this good turn. I fled for my life. I have seen—" He stretched out both hands and shook his huge fists in the darkness of the stable. Between curses and prayers, he told of the horrors of the road, of his caravan and his disguise.

Mesrob listened, unmoved. "She's here," he insisted doggedly. "I've seen her; I've spoken to her. She didn't know me at first; they've drugged her and disguised her with paint and fine clothes, but it's Filore. Can I be mistaken? I—why, I love her!"

Kevork gazed at him with growing pity. He had heard of a sudden blow turning a man's brain. Could a shell, perhaps, have tapped Mesrob in passing and knocked his wits out of place? It seemed unlikely, but this was an age of horrors; it might also be an age of miracles. He would humor the boy.

"Where is she?" he asked soberly, leaning over, his big elbows on his knees, a huge bulk of a man in the dingy semi-darkness. "I should like to see her—seeing, you know, is believing, my son."

"It is easy," Mesrob assured him. "There's a hole in the wall. I have but to move the brick out and watch until she comes to the fountain. If she feels like it she speaks to me. Once she thrust her hand through, and I kissed it. It was Filore's hand, that I swear. I—"

He stopped, breathing hard, and Kevork fancied that his eyes shone in the dark.

"I've planned a way to get her out. There's a Greek here, I met him at the barracks; he was selling oranges, trying to find a friend of his, as I know now. He's got a boat, we're—"

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Mesrob again leaned over and laid his hand this time on Kevork's knee.

"We're planning to get her on that boat at night and—and be captured by the French," he whispered.

Kevork shook his head. "How many of our people lie already at the bottom of Marmora?" he asked sternly. "A wild scheme, Mesrob."

"I'll get her out for all that!"

The potter frowned in the darkness. Of course this was some madness, but it would lead to Mesrob's death. He had known the boy's father and loved him, and he loved the boy also. He laid a heavy hand on Mesrob's shoulder.

"Let me see her," he said slowly, soothingly again. "I'm an old man, my son, compared with you—maybe I can find a way to help you. Let me see Filore."

Mesrob rose from the straw, stretching his hands above his head with a groan; he had been long in the trenches, and he was stiff and sore.

"You don't believe she's here," he returned grimly, "but come—you shall see for yourself!"

It was growing dusky outside now, and they felt their way to the stable-door and tiptoed across the courtyard. There were many voices in the house, some loud talking and the clatter of dishes. The streets, unlit and dirty, were deserted, and the incessant boom of artillery filled their ears.

The two walked silently; an Armenian word here, a slip in their talk, and they were lost. Mesrob led, looking a Turkish soldier; the potter followed heavily. Here and there a light twinkled faintly behind lattices, but the darkness and the noise were everywhere.

Kevork, trying to keep the way clear in his mind, thought Mesrob plainly mad. He twisted and turned and went to and fro. But at last they were out of reach, no soldiers appeared in the quarter, and the thunder of the guns grew less insistent. Then came a droning sound that seemed to fill their ears, and Mesrob caught his arm and pointed upward. Something like a huge black bird hovered far up and then swept off seaward.

"Scouting airplane," he whispered.

They went on. They could see the outlines of Sancta Sophia against the sky, but there were no bells, a silent city. It was smitten and in the throes of a life-and-death struggle. Kevork, remembering his people, prayed, not as the righteous pray who are answered, but in a sudden passion and bitterness, for destruction. He prayed that the city might fall a prey to desolation, that its defenses might crumble at the sound of those cannon, as the walls of Jerusalem fell at the sound of the trumpet.

From this fierce rapture Mesrob roused him.

"There is the wall; stoop low that the porter may not see us as we pass."

They were dodging the latticed windows and the gate of the courtyard. It was a large house, Kevork noticed, and there was a garden. Along under the wall of this Mesrob led him.

It was a still place, a narrow alley where the weeds grew. Far down at the end the young Armenian stopped and deftly drew a broken brick from a crevice. Straining every nerve, he listened and watched there, and Kevork, his own great height doubled over, observed him quietly, sure now of his madness, and thinking sadly of the Syrian woman back among the Taurus Mountains.

Then he heard a new sound, not of guns or battle, the tinkle of a guitar and Mesrob's tense figure seemed to relax. After a while he called to Kevork.

"Look," he whispered, "look — it's Filore!"

The potter stooped heavily and peered through the opening. What he saw at first was a big court with a fountain. There was a soft light under an arch, sheltered thus from airplanes. A mass of foliage and some flowers and the sound of a guitar.

Then his eyes growing accustomed to the narrowed perspective, he perceived a young figure in a rich Turkish dress, wide satin trousers, tiny slippers, a gold-braided velvet jacket, bare arms with bracelets, and braided hair that hung low on her shoulders.

He started violently; the figure was like the figure of Marsovan's granddaughter. Many times had the child stood beside his wheel watching him make amphoras. He

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would know her, he thought, among a thousand. It was her figure!

While he stared, bewildered, she turned and looked toward his loophole, and the light fell full on her face. She was rouged; there were dark lines under her lashes; her lips were painted, but it was Filore—feature for feature, line for line. Kevork gasped.

"You know her?" said Mesrob in his ear.

Kevork nodded, his eye still glued to the crevice. But she had heard the murmur of Mesrob's speech, and she looked back over her shoulder toward the house. Evidently she was reassured; she dropped her guitar and came toward the wall.

Kevork fell back, pushing Mesrob forward.

"She's coming!" he whispered excitedly.

The young man went to the loophole and hung there, listening and answering in a low tone. Kevork, meanwhile, moved along the wall, thinking. He felt dazed; it was and it was not Filore. Besides, it could not be. He counted days, how could it?

He leaned against the wall, his shoulders nearly up to the overhanging ledge, where a rose-vine tumbled its blossoms down in lovely festoons. He was pondering deeply, after his fashion, when Mesrob left the loophole and came to him. It was nearly dark now, and his face showed like a pale patch in the gloom.

"She wants me," he said hoarsely. "I'm going to find out now—to know what I can do. You can help me; stand still, Kevork!"

As he spoke he leaped suddenly and drew himself up on the big potter's shoulders. Before Kevork knew it, before he could argue or object, Mesrob had clambered from his shoulders to the top of the wall and dropped over.

The potter was alone in the alley.

CHAPTER XIX.

FLIGHT.

"WE'VE got to do it," Braley said at last, a little pale under his tan. "There's no other way, and the moonlight will help us."

Filore said nothing; sitting astride her horse, her boyishly clad figure slim in the moonshine, she looked plucky enough, though her heart was thumping against her side, and her ears rang.

They were looking down-stream, and the water shone, exquisite and still, between the banks; low branches swept it, here and there a ripple showed a shallow; it was nowhere very deep, and the current favored them. Braley scanned it, listening keenly, all the while, for hoof-beats on the trail behind them. He cursed himself for having let Abdul loose. Sheer madness, he knew now, too late to retrieve that mistake.

"They'll come after us, of course," he said almost harshly; "and they'll be sure we crossed the bridge"—his eye dwelt on a tumble-down affair that spanned the river precariously—"and they'll cross it and go on. If we ford the stream and go up in the water a while and hide, we have a chance—one in a hundred—to get behind them; on the other hand, we don't know the stream; we may have to swim our horses." He turned his head and looked at her a moment and then smiled.

"Are you ready to risk it?"

"Have I anything to lose, effendi?" she answered softly, her eyes on the stream. "I'd—I'd rather die there, you know."

He nodded; he did not trust himself to speak, and he could not be eloquent. Besides, time passed, and Abdul had the best horses.

"I'll go first," he said briefly, and urged his horse down the steep bank.

There was an anxious moment, and then they found that the river was very shallow here, scarcely up to their saddle-girths. Braley took heart, not for himself, but for her. She was a splendid rider; even if they had to swim their horses she would keep her seat.

He felt a touch of pride in such a comrade; talk of the suffragettes at home! Here was a girl, bred in seclusion, skilled—he fancied—in needlework and woman's ways, but a fearless comrade, a great horsewoman, and ready—calmly ready now—to die! Figuratively he took off his hat to her, actually he rode with his cap pulled down over his eyes and his head thrust

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forward, scanning their course. A hole, a slippery stone or an unsuspected rapid, what then?

The moon shone splendidly. Far away he heard the jackals howl. The horses waded cautiously, feeling their way, necks arched and quarters quivering slightly, but they went well. They were brave, too. It was in the air, this fatalism, that was it, he reflected, Christian and Moslem, they had caught it; what must be, must be.

He heard the horses splashing in the stream; it was a little deeper now, and his was restive. However, they must go on. A little way farther the river had an elbow; he feared that beyond that was deeper, perhaps more dangerous. As soon as they were out of sight of the road he proposed landing and waiting. Before long, pursuit —if there were any—would materialize; then he should know what to do.

To have tried to escape by the road would have been sheer madness; he did not know the way, and Aarif's men would. Of course, Abdul had gone to Aarif, the thing was planned, a put-up scheme, he saw it all. But—he registered a vow—there would be some bloodshed before Aarif Effendi got the prize.

Their horses were swimming now, and the moon went suddenly behind a cloud. In the luminous darkness he watched their course. As he thought, the land jutted out and trees intervened. He could no longer see the bridge by looking back, and the bank to the left, the sheltered bank, sloped easily to the water's edge.

"We'd better land," he called back to Filore, turning his horse's head for shore.

There was more splashing behind, but she mastered her mount and the two horses swam ashore almost abreast. As they emerged, dripping and panting, on the sand-bank, the moon came out again and showed them a bit of clear ground, well sheltered by beach and trees. They could no longer see even a bit of the road they had just left, but far up on the mountain-side opposite was the trail they had descended. Not far away the Kurd must be lying still, unless Abdul had secured him.

Braley got down and held the horses' heads while Filore slipped from the saddle. It was very still, and they listened. Not a sound alarmed them, only a deep sense of peace, of nearness, almost of safety.

Yet all this time he had been thinking of the risks ahead, of their small chance, and, most of all, of his promise to Marsovan. He could not help thinking of it, for he caught the outline of the boyish figure standing beside the dripping horse.

She was stroking the animal's nose gently and talking to it in a low voice. What she said was in Armenian; doubtless the horse understood, for he rubbed his head against her shoulder. Braley turned away and led his own animal up under the trees.

The moon showed the old trail so plainly that he felt sure he should see their pursuers when they came. He had no doubt in the world that Aarif Effendi would come. He would come because he had set his covetous eyes on the girl.

Braley gritted his teeth in silence, looking down at the Kurd's long gun, but he reflected grimly that he had no ammunition, only the charge in the gun.

"Enough to kill one or two Turks anyway," he thought grimly. Then he became aware of that lovely boy at his elbow.

"Effendi"—she had a bewitching way of mingling her Turkish, her Armenian, and her very good English together; she did it adorably, especially the English, with an accent—"effendi, if we're taken, you and I, will you—" She stopped, and he heard her catch her breath—she was choking back tears.

He waited, he could see the curve of her white cheek in the moonlight, pale through Umn Mesrob's stain, and the mystery of her eyes.

"Will you kill me?" she asked steadily at last.

He recoiled with horror. "I—kill you?" he repeated with pale lips; then he shuddered. "For God's sake, don't ask me!"

"I would rather you would—I don't want to kill myself, it's—it's not Christian, is it? I was thinking about it out there in the river when our horses were swimming. My mother did it, of course, and I've promised. But—if you will, effendi?"

"Why must we talk about it? We're not caught yet—with God's help we'll get

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off! I—" He looked down at her, the slight figure, the delicate, uplifted face, the beauty that was as subtle in its charm as the East itself, full of its mystery and its lure.

"Filore, I—I couldn't!"

"Then I must!" she said simply, and turned away, her figure drooping a little. "I've really no hope that we'll get through now," she added over her shoulder. "How can we? They'll telegraph ahead of us; we'll never reach the mission."

"You haven't much confidence in my wits!" he broke out, shaken to the heart, swept with the wildest desire to take her in his arms and comfort her, to vow to save her or die!

"You're only one man," she replied in a dull voice, but in English; "we've been hunted so long that the hunters are expert. I've heard—the old people have told me—of men and women lying hidden for days in swamps only to be rooted out at last and murdered. You're an American. I hope that will save you; but I'm not likely to escape—unless—" She pointed at the river.

"They'll only get you over my dead body!" he exclaimed hoarsely. He felt melodramatic and unnatural, but he meant it. Suddenly he had dropped from the sane life of an every-day world into a world gone awry, frantic with blood-lust and arson and the destruction of women and children.

Filore said nothing; she was standing, twisting her hands together, and looking down into the river. Clouds, scudding across the moon, made great floating shadows on a surface of silver. Braley tethered the horses and broke off some balsam boughs and spread them under a tree; on top of them he made a pillow of his coat. Then he came down to the water's edge and touched her arm gently.

"Go and lie down," he said with authority; "try to rest. I've got to watch, and we may be hours yet in the saddle."

She looked up rebelliously, her face quivering. "Why should I? You need it, too!"

"Take the first rest and I'll take the first watch," he answered. "Then—I promise you—I'll rest while you watch."

She went, almost reeling with fatigue, and threw herself down in the shelter he had invented. She was sure that she could not sleep, but she did not know how worn-out she was. Her eyes closed with the sound of running water in her ears and a strange sense of peace.

Braley, meanwhile, sat at the edge of the stream with the Kurd's gun across his knees, and kept vigil. It was not a pleasant one. He had another vision of the opera house in New York and the fat tenor singing divinely in an imaginary tomb; there was the box, too, full of gay people, and he remembered Lucy Stone's eyes when she had given him her picture. It was in his pocket now with his passports, and he had nearly forgotten it. In fact his tobacco-pouch was on top of it.

He took the tobacco out and filled his pipe; there was no danger of any one detecting the smoke of it here. It was a long time since he had smoked a pipe, and it soothed him; he began to speculate on his chances of getting ahead of Aarif Effendi. But all the while he was subtly aware of the shadowy figure stretched under the tree.

Scarcely larger than a child, she looked as she lay there, and wholly boyish, her lovely face being hidden on her arm, but she pervaded his thoughts, she came between him and the remembrances of home, her charm had laid hold of him, he could not escape it if he would. And she had asked him to kill her!

He gasped, dashing his pipe on the ground. The horror of her fate stood out before him now; he had seen it in Aarif's narrow eyes, in his sleek, confident smile! Braley's hands tightened on the Kurd's gun, he ran his finger down the long barrel; it was good to feel it, to feel the certainty of steel and lead.

The short eastern night wore to its close; day broke magnificent and unafraid. Against the lovely sky the Taurus Mountains took on more lights and shadows, a mantle of green enfolded the slopes, a golden mist touched the heights.

Braley's eyes fixed themselves on the pass. He could see mounted men descending in single file. He counted ten or twelve—soldiers, too, by their riding; in advance,

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two figures, Abdul, he thought, and Aarif Effendi. He drew back into the shadow of the trees and watched.

Filore still slept heavily, exhausted from her long vigil. Their pursuers kept the trail steadily, and after a while disappeared behind a spur of the hill. The air was so still that Braley listened, sure he would hear them if they crossed the bridge. He did, in fact, hear the stones roll as the horses scrambled down the last stretch.

At the bridge there must have been a pause, a search, perhaps, for hoof-marks. At any rate, it seemed an interminable time before he did hear the distant sound of iron-shod feet on wood. Then silence. They had followed the road.

He breathed more easily and sat waiting, not smoking now, his heart beating heavily. Their chances, slim though they were, were better. Could he save her? For himself he had no thought.

He turned and looked back. She lay with her head on her arm; the short-cropped hair gave a boyish aspect to a lovely head, the eyes were closed, long thick lashes swept a perfect cheek; the lips were slightly parted. Umn Mesrob had stained the face and forgotten the throat; it was full and white and perfect.

Braley drew a deep breath; he knew the truth about himself, and his face paled a little. He had never dreamed it; he had, all the while, had a vague idea of going back to marry Lucy Stone. He remembered the picture and Croydon's warnings, and smiled, a little grimly.

How little it all mattered now! He had meant every word that he said: Aarif could not have Filore, he would fight for her to the end. He knew it as he rose slowly to his feet and set himself the task of another day of effort.

He saw to the horses carefully, much would depend on them and, fortunately, they had fed themselves and rested; they seemed fit enough. There was little food for Filore and himself, they must go on short commons, but that would not matter if he succeeded in his task to-day. They must go on, and as the sun rose he judged it safe, as safe as it would ever be.

He roused Filore and went about his business of tightening girths and looking to the saddles. A time might come when everything would depend on a strap or a buckle. He had just swung the Kurd's gun to his saddle-bow when Filore came up with his coat. She was a little flushed under her tan and her eyes, dewy from sleep, were shy. She held his coat out, and with it a photograph.

"I found this under the coat, effendi," she said in a low voice. "It—is it your sister?"

"No; not my sister—a friend in New York."

Filore hesitated, looking down now. "She's very pretty," she remarked.

He put Lucy's photograph in his pocket, watching the charming profile.

"She was with me when I heard the opera sung, you remember?" he smiled. "She's an old friend; she'd like to meet you, Filore."

Filore said nothing; instead she went to her own horse and stroked his nose. While she was thus occupied Braley told her of the party ahead.

"We can risk it now, I think," he said in a businesslike tone. "They'll hardly turn back, and we may get off safe at last."

She was in a fever to be off at that, and swung herself into the saddle before he was ready; nor did she say much as they made their horses take to the water again. In broad daylight the dangers were less and the animals rather liked the plunge.

Silently, save for the splash of swimming horses, they made their way back, got them up the bank and struck the road a little below the bridge. As far as they could see the road was empty, save for lovely shadows and the turtles on the river-bank.

They rode along, still silent, Braley anxious, Filore downcast. The wonderful country unfolded before them, rich in its fertile warmth, its languid tints of yellow and of purple; here and there a poppy flaunted like a red flag in some bit of low-land. There were no signs of trouble, except—yes, far off there a bit of smoke—what was it, he wondered.

"Effendi, you've been good to me," this very softly, "and—and will you give that to—to her when you go home?"

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He started and turned. Filore was not looking at him, but with a hand that shook a little she held out her beads, the tizpay. He hesitated, then he took them and held them a moment, looking at her averted face.

"What if I kept them instead—may I, Filore?"

She nodded. There was a lump in her throat.

They rode on a bit, and he was thinking again, thinking harder than ever. But he said nothing of it, for a turn brought them to the crossroads, and he dropped from his saddle to look for tracks. Plainly, the party ahead had gone to the right. He came back quickly.

"We must go to the left," he said, and then saw that she was swaying in her saddle. "You're ill!" he exclaimed.

"No, no, only hungry and faint." She forced a smile. "We must go on; there's a village this way, but we can pass through it."

He mounted again, feeling anxious enough. "We'll have to try it; are you sure you're not ill?"

She shook her head, smiling again, and straightened herself in the saddle. "I'll be all right. It can't be very far now to the mission, is it?"

Braley thought not; he was not sure. He slipped the tizpay into his pocket and rode on, his hand on her rein now. If she gave out, their chances were small indeed. She was very pale, her whole figure drooped; he was moved beyond the restraint he had set on himself. He leaned toward her.

"Filore!" he said softly.

She lifted her head and their eyes met, her lips quivered.

"Effendi!"

He laid his hand softly on her. "Filore—the way is long, but love—love travels with me—Filore."

She was trembling, she would not answer, and her horse started away from his. There was a moment when neither of them could speak, but she smiled a little through tears. Then suddenly smoke came to meet them and through the trees they could see fire.

Filore drew rein. "They're burning a village—and we were thinking of ourselves! Oh, my poor people!" she breathed, her eyes fixed on the distance.

Braley sat staring at it, too. Love's wild young dream was rudely broken; they were trapped. They could not go back, on the other road was Aarif Effendi, on this—what? Probably bashi-bazouks.

He looked about, after a moment, and saw a bit of woodland and a half-worn path. He took Filore's horse by the bridle again. They were both pale and their hands shook as they touched, but this was no time for words.

"You'll have to stay here in these trees while I go forward. If we can get by I'll find a way. Anyhow, I'll come back at once—as soon as I know."

As he spoke he led her horse off the road. Among the shade of the trees they stopped.

"No further," she begged. "I—I'm not afraid, but from here I can see you. I want to feel that—that you're safe. It's a massacre—don't you see, it's a massacre?"

He tried to quiet her by a few words; it was the hardest moment he had had. He saw that she was trembling and unnerved, and yet she dragged her hand out of his. It was not all well between them, and, manlike, he forgot Lucy's picture altogether.

"I'm coming back," he assured her, "in a moment. I can see quite well not a hundred yards from this. You're safe, so I can risk it!"

He turned his horse and rode off, going cautiously into the open. The place was vacant but for smoke, that came in wreaths and puffs. He went forward slowly, looking ahead. Before him was a small village, the weather-worn brown houses looking as if they were huddled together in haste; there was a church and a mill by the river. He could hear the crackle of flames and see a struggling lot of people in the single street. He could make out the dirty white and rusty black of the men, all Moslems, he judged, then—coming nearer—he heard the screams of women and children, heart-rending cries.

A house had been fired and they were flinging them back into the flames. A massacre, a sacked village!

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He saw it now with his own eyes and sat helplessly in his saddle, viewing the edge of it, aware of sickening cries and a more sickening odor of smoke. Horror held him only a moment more. He knew that they could not pass. In some way they must go around it. He ran his eye over the country and chose the river-bank. Then, with that horror in his ears, he turned and rode back.

The sunshine was dimmed with smoke even here, but the empty road gave him a throb of relief. Their ledge of rocks and trees, an oasis in the plain, hid the other road from his view. He urged his horse, crossed the open space and reached the little group of trees. It was empty. Filore and her horse had disappeared!

CHAPTER XX.

CAPTURE.

BRALEY'S first thought was that Filore, still piqued, had hidden herself; his next was sheer terror. She was gone. By a trail of broken boughs and trodden leaves he could trace her horse.

She had not been alone. It was a wide track, two horses—perhaps three—had broken a way through to the other trail. They must have gone to the cross-roads. They could not have forded the river here; it was too deep at the curve and far too swift. Besides, though he searched the bank, there were no hoof-marks, and the turtles were still sunning themselves on a sand-bar.

But, on the other side of the road, he found traces, the marks here of two horses, and the tracks pointed the way that Aarif's party had gone.

There could be only one explanation, they had been ambushed. A difficult matter in that country, too, only that group of trees had helped them. Their feat, last night, swimming the river, had not served. Some one—Aarif himself very likely—had suspected the ruse and waited for them to come up behind, waited and trapped the girl.

In that case, it had been easy, Braley suddenly saw how easy, and cursed his own thick-headedness. He should never have left her, never have tried the village. What use had it been? He could smell the smoke from it now; his flesh crept at the thought of its horrors.

And into such hands had fallen that charming creature, that boyishly-clad figure that so defied disguise as a boy.

There are supreme moments in life, and this was one for Braley Ryan. He knew then—once for all—his own heart. He loved Filore and he had lost her. Lost her to a fate so terrible that every drop of blood in his veins fired at the thought, and his breath came hard. He felt as men do, who know that their women have been wrested from them by ruffianly hands. There is no redress, but it must be wiped out in blood, it is the unforgivable thing.

Braley ran his hands again down the long barrel of the Kurd's gun, his fingers twitching with passion. Yet he must make haste slowly; he must not lose the trail, and he must wait his chance. No matter how deep his anger he was but one man, a man against a dozen. Besides, he had a plan, a forlorn hope, of carrying this to the embassy at Constantinople, of getting help there to bring Aarif to account.

Aarif Effendi it was, of course, he did not doubt that. The first thing was to make sure of the direction they had taken, and then to keep his head. He knew they would strike for the railroad; there was no reason why Aarif Effendi should not journey openly; the mere presence of a prisoner or two would not matter, it would be, doubtless, to his credit.

Braley searched the ground carefully, and made sure that they were ahead, then he mounted, swung the Kurd's long gun across his saddle-bow, and started. The horse had rested and was tolerably fresh; besides the road was entering the plain and comparatively easy. In a little while he would be clear of the foot-hills of the Taurus and see the poppies ablaze in the level country. Not far off was the Mediterranean, the mountains of Syria lay behind him.

He rode steadily, looking sharply about him, swinging low in his saddle to look ahead. Scattered houses, some in flames,

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occasionally obstructed his view, but a little further and there would be a flat stretch of country, he must see them.

He set his teeth hard, he was not sure what he should do. He could not wrest her from them, single-handed, it would do no good to single out Aarif and shoot him; that would mean his own death and leave her to the brutal soldiers, who would be worse than their master.

He must play his cards carefully, treat her as a boy, if that myth would pass still, and join the party. The chances yet might favor him. He doubted Aarif's willingness to offend Croydon. If he could but keep in touch, overtake them before they reached the train, he would risk his own life gladly for hers. He knew that now.

Yet there was a chance, after all, that it was not Aarif. He remembered the village and shuddered. He remembered, too, with shame, his boast to her that they would get her only over his dead body! He felt humbled, almost at sea, but he kept on. Find her he must.

He knew now that to get her and carry her off he must use caution, what he did would have to be done by stealth, could not be done at all until they reached Constantinople. Would they get there?

Threshing it out in his fevered brain, he rode, and, at last, there was a long glimpse of the plain, and he saw horsemen close at hand. He swung down again in his saddle and looked ahead. He could not be mistaken. Aarif Effendi was there and, yes, a boyish figure on a led horse. They were riding slowly, deliberately, not caring for pursuit. Why should they, a dozen men to one?

Braley said hot things and wild ones in his heart, but his head was steady enough. He could not fight twelve men and save her.

He urged his horse forward and was riding fast when he came to the last straggling tree. Looking across the plain he did not look up to see what manner of fruit it bore. An oversight!

He heard nothing, saw nothing but that one slight figure ahead, and was taken unawares when a bough cracked overhead, a weight dropped stunningly on his shoulders, and his head was muffled in a cloth.

There was a struggle, a fierce one, but Braley was, in fact, the under dog. Instinctively, he kept one hand on his horse at first, but the brute plunged and the Kurd's precious gun slid to the ground with a loud explosion. Frightened at that the horse started to run, the two men twisting on his back and wrestling. Then Braley got his head uncovered and discovered Abdul—very pale and breathless—trying to hold him. In another moment he had wrenched himself free and cast the boy off. There was much ado to bring the horse up on his haunches almost at Aarif's side.

Braley, disheveled, red and angry, glared at him fiercely enough. "I'd like to know the meaning of this?" he cried. "You set that boy on me!"

Aarif Effendi shook his head, smiling, quite urbane and calm. "We wanted your gun without trouble, effendi," he said suavely. "You see, this boy saw you try to kill your guard. I regret it, but the Feriq Pasha has ordered your arrest."

"I'm an American citizen," replied Braley, suddenly cool, as he saw the trend affairs were taking. They meant to trap him, make him helpless. "I shall protest."

Aarif shrugged his shoulders. "I'm sorry, very. But, at least, I can be of service, effendi, and a fight would be useless; suppose you come with us quietly, and we'll get it all sifted out in Constantinople."

"I'm willing—more—anxious to go to the city," Braley replied at once, "but that boy"—he pointed at the figure ahead—"is with me. I hired him in the mountains."

"He's also under arrest," replied Aarif blandly. "He's an Armenian. I'm sorry, but you see how it is. You don't understand us yet, effendi, nor our necessities. A people in rebellion!" He shrugged his shoulders again.

Braley looked him squarely in the eye a moment. Though he did not speak the look, it said plainly enough: "You lie!"

Meanwhile, Abdul had scrambled up from the dust and bringing the Kurd's gun, was anxiously avoiding Braley's vicinity.

Aarif Effendi opened his cigarette-case and tendered it to the American. "I should

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hate to be forced to hard measures," he said urbanely. "You're under arrest again, effendi. I hope you'll come with us pleasantly. I have influence, you know, in Constantinople; you have influence; it is only a temporary inconvenience."

"No, I sha'n't smoke," said Braley, waving back the proffered cigarette-case, "but I'll come, of course. Did you expect me to fight twelve men with my bare hands?" he added with bitter irony.

"Well, we've heard about the Kurd," retorted Aarif and laughed. Then he started his horse. "Ride beside me, if you please, effendi."

Braley pulled himself together and rode on with him, aware that two or three Turkish soldiers fell in behind. In front he saw the boyish figure still ahead and he fixed his eyes on it. He tried to send a message of the mind across, to say that he was there, and there to do his best.

Then the memory of his bragging assurances to her made him feel a numskull, and he was aware of the ingratiating scent of Aarif's cigarette. They were out now on the plains; in a half-hour, perhaps less, they would reach the railroad. There was no chance at all of going to the missions.

Braley saw that he was isolated. Besides, he knew that the missionaries could do nothing. He could still smell the smoke from that burning village, hear the cries. The hyenas had tasted blood, they could not be driven off. He became aware suddenly of Aarif's smooth voice in his ear.

"Your friend, Marsovan, the elder of the village, is dead," he remarked between whiffs at his cigarette.

Braley turned sharply. "Did you kill him?"

The Turk feigned indignant surprise.

"I had nothing to do with the village," he replied, aggrieved. "The Feriq Pasha and the mufti were in charge. Marsovan was an old man, he was a good deal worried by the search of his house, and, no doubt, he was mixed up in the whole bad business. They sent for him to Zeitoun to interrogate him, I believe, and he dropped dead on the way."

A swift mental picture of the old man's noble figure, his bowed, white head, and his feet tottering on the sun-baked road to Zeitoun, kept Braley silent for a moment. He could see the thing. Marsovan, for his age, a strong man, but driven hopeless, giving up at last of a broken heart. The girl—she was alone now and Braley remembered his promise—almost an oath—to guard her as his own sister.

Half an hour ago he had been pleased with himself, proud of his exploit with the Kurd, of the neat manner of outwitting pursuit, as he thought, but now he crumpled up. He felt himself a fool and no hero. Besides, the case for her was desperate.

He could see the triumph in the Turk's sleek complacence, the fire in the ratty eyes that he had always hated! And what to do? He let the thought of Marsovan drop, the thought of the desolate women and children sobbing for the last time on the door-steps of their houses, of the hideous things that he had glimpsed but now in the burning village, and bent his mind on his problem.

He must not lose sight of Filore. At any cost, even of indignity, he must stay in the party, hazard no escape, for only in Constantinople could he get help and backing, if he got it there!

Did Aarif Effendi mean to take her to Constantinople? he asked himself anxiously. What was happening there? The world had dropped out of his thoughts, and yet the Turks were using that battle at Gallipoli as an excuse for suppressing a supposed Armenian rebellion to help the Allies. If the straits were won Aarif Effendi might not go back—what then?

After all, it was hopeless, a problem that must solve itself. There was no way to think the thing out; one must act. He reflected bitterly that he was again unarmed, thanks to Abdul's attack. It was picturesque, of course, but he would have had to give up the gun anyway if they had forced him. In the scramble he might have fired, though, the temptation would have been strong. He rode silently, his brows down, thinking in spite of his conclusion that it was useless to think.

They were turning to cross the plain on the way to Tarsus and the railroad. On one side lay the Taurus, beautiful against

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the sky, on the other the river flowed straight toward the flat-roofed town. Another dead camel lay by the wayside and, farther on, down the bank, Braley's quick eye caught the body of a man.

He looked ahead eagerly; the missions were in Tarsus. If the soldiers were not already in force, there might be a chance, a slender one. He turned to Aarif Effendi and broke the silence harshly.

"I suppose I can see my people at the mission here?" he said. "I need clothes, anyway, and rest. What do you propose to do? I have a safe-conduct."

Aarif Effendi threw away his cigarette. He was as smooth as usual, perhaps a little smoother.

"Unfortunately I have to say no, effendi." He was slightly smiling now. "You see, you left the village practically a prisoner—for reasons of safety—war times, and we must look to ourselves, and you turned on your guard. The soldier wasn't quite killed, but nearly. You're now under arrest for that, and it's my duty—extremely unpleasant of course—but still my duty to take you straight through to Constantinople. There's a train now—a special—waiting for me at Tarsus."

"Suppose," said Braley coolly, his eye on him, "suppose the Allies get there before you do?"

The Turk shrugged. "They will not," he declared, and then he grinned. For the first time he turned his head and looked full at Braley of his own accord, his ratty eyes less veiled than usual by their thick lids.

The two men eyed each other, measuring strength, the Turk immensely elated by his own position; he had the cards all in his hand. Yet, if the truth be told, he did not altogether despise his opponent. There were, after all, twists to this affair, diplomatic ones. He knew that Braley would leave no stone unturned, and no one could tell how far the pasha would go when it came to offending a neutral nation through its envoy. A dangerous game just then, perhaps, for Turkey.

For all that, Aarif had the game in his hand and he meant to keep it. The girl was his, he should not give her up, though—by the way—they had not mentioned her, nor even admitted that she was a girl. They knew it and that was, at the moment, more than enough.

Meanwhile, Braley had arrived at a desperate conclusion. He meant to have a word with Filore, to warn her of her grandfather's death, that he might not be used as a means to intimidate her into any measure that would supposedly save the old man from exile. He must hearten her up, make sure that she did not contemplate suicide at the first opportunity.

The road, widening out as the minarets of the city came nearer, the party had spread out too. The soldiers were still behind, but those in front straggled, except the man who led Filore's horse. She sat in the saddle, a boy only in clothing, all her little pretense at boyish swagger gone.

Suddenly Braley struck his heel against his horse's flank, the tired animal started and made a gallant plunge forward. His rider was almost abreast of the horses in front, his hand was already on Filore's bridle, when Aarif—on a fresh horse—came between. He caught Braley's animal by the bit. The two horses plunged, Aarif uttered a quick, guttural order in Turkish, and the guards closed in. Braley glared at him over his horse's head, getting control of him, but aware that he could not go on.

"Did you think I meant to run?" he asked Aarif scornfully, in English. "I only meant to speak to that boy—you exceed your authority, I think."

The Turk shook his head, showing his white teeth unpleasantly. "Like fangs," Braley thought. "A thousand regrets," he said blandly, "but prisoners cannot communicate, effendi. And," he hesitated, then his eyes gleamed with a sinister triumph, "I'm sorry, but I must place you now under guard."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TWO FILORES.

TO drop over the wall into a Turkish harem was no light thing to do and Mesrob knew it, knew that he risked his life as well as his liberty. But over he went

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clutching the vine and dragging a little of it with him, so that he came with a shower of rose leaves, feet first, on the tesselated floor of the court.

The spray of the fountain blew in his face and the light, that had twinkled there like a star, seemed to go out suddenly. It was dim and sweet and silent, silent except for the clamor of his own heart.

At first he did not even see the girl, for she had dodged back behind the fountain, but she did see through a long arcade a lighted interior and figures moving, women, he thought. He took a step forward and looked about him.

"Filore," he whispered, and again to the rose-scented silence: "Filore!"

It was after this that he became certain of the figure behind the fountain.

"Why don't you answer me?" he whispered in Armenian. "What have they done to you, Filore? You're changed!"

She came cautiously around the fountain and stood looking at him, two delicate, beringed hands clasped against her breast, her elaborate dress of satins and silks, jewels at her throat and wound in her long, beautiful hair. Her painted cheeks and lips showed no change of emotion, but her eyes were soft.

"I do not understand you," she said in Turkish, and then with a little smile, "and I do not know you."

Mesrob suffered a feeling of disintegration. Was it Filore, or was it not Filore? The voice is a subtle thing; it is played upon by emotions as the harp is touched by the musician, but it is the same voice, individual, personal, infinitely changeable, and yet unchanged.

This girl's voice was not the voice of Filore. Mesrob took a step backward and laid his hand again on the rose vine, aware of its subtle perfume, sweet and fresh amid the artificial scents of the harem.

"I'm Mesrob," he said in Turkish, "Mesrob Khorene, the Armenian. You're promised to me, Filore. Have you forgotten the hillside below the great rock and the pass with the dead tree? Do you remember your grandfather Marsovan, the 'Ak-Sakal' of the village, and Umn Mesrob, my mother, and—the little kid?"

She smiled, dabbing her fingers in the edge of the fountain. "I know none of these people, effendi. I am Leila—this is the house of Aarif Effendi, and you—do you know it is death to climb that wall? They'd kill you if they found you here."

Mesrob was bewildered, unconvinced. He could not believe his eyes. "You haven't her voice," he admitted slowly; "but you've got her face, her figure, her eyes, her—yes, I firmly swear it, her hands!"

The girl stretched her hands out and looked at them curiously, not a little pleased with the sparkle of her rings. She was like a child, apparently untamed and unspoiled. She came a step nearer, examining Mesrob with soft eyes. She noticed how straight and tall he was; she had seen that through the loophole, but, at a nearer view, his eyes were handsome and he had a wide, sensitive mouth. There was something fine and brave about him, he was so unlike the only men she knew. The coquette in Leila was downcast.

"Who's Filore?" she asked mildly, picking one of the roses and pressing it against her cheek, her velvety eyes on him.

Mesrob, still dazed, was racking his brain. Then, suddenly out of the twilight emerged the thought of the big cliff over the river, where Filore's Greek mother had leaped to her death, holding her child in her arms. Could it be? They had found the body of the woman, he remembered that, the baby's—never! He took a step nearer and he recalled his Turkish.

"Filore Marsovan is an Armenian girl," he began simply, watching the face that was the face of Filore. "She lives up in the Taurus Mountains and there is no one left to her but her grandfather. The Turks massacred her father, her mother leaped into the river to escape them, in her arms she held Filore's twin sister, a baby then. They found the mother's body, the little girl's was never found. Filore has, therefore, no sister nor brother nor father nor mother, and Filore is so like you, that—well, I think you must be Filore!"

She was interested; her eyes widened and her lips parted with a look so like Filore's that it made his heart ache. She turned

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and looked over her shoulder, then she tiptoed softly back to the low door which had given Mesrob his first vision of the interior. She locked it and thrust the key into her bosom. Then she came back, her eyes dancing, the expression of a naughty child in her face. She tossed a cushion on the floor.

"Sit down," she whispered. "For a while we are safe; no one is watching just now. The *chellabi* is away!" And she laughed, dropping herself into a corner by the fountain and looking adorable in the soft dusk.

"Now I will tell you," she said softly, "all I know myself. The eunuch told me, old Ahmet, the only man who was always kind to me, and he is dead. I am an Armenian. They know it and they make me feel, sometimes, like a slave, but I've lived all my life here. That is it, I know nothing else.

"Do you see the bracelets on my ankles? I'm a great dancer. They say the Sultan would like me in the Yildiz Kiosk. That's their idea of being great—the Yildiz Kiosk! I was brought here a baby. A soldier rode into Constantinople one day with a little baby—half dead—at his saddle-bow. He had dragged me out of the river, just breathing, and had forced a Turkish woman to care for me until he came back. He brought me on his horse as a gift to his general, old Aarif Pasha.

"I was brought up here. I never saw anything else, and I—I think I liked it until old Ahmet told me that I was Armenian, one of the spoils of a massacre!

"Since then I've listened, I've heard stories, I've thought, and the blood in my veins runs hot. I know when they murder Armenians, and I hate them. I want to be avenged, I want to kill one of them, anyway; some day"—she laughed wickedly, showing her even white teeth—"some day I will, I swear it!"

Mesrob did not believe in her threats. He was under the spell of her eyes and her lips. The faint perfume of her hair and her garments was more subtle than the perfume of the roses.

"You're Filore's twin sister," he said gravely. "You're one of us. It's a crime to have you here, you—I'm trying to remember your name. My mother would know it."

She put out a white hand and laid it softly, caressingly, on his sleeve. "My name is Leila; I could never get used to any other. Call me Leila, Mesrob."

She spoke his name softly, daringly bending toward him, a beauty of the harem, trained to the ways of the harem, a little heartless, perhaps, and cruel, but deeply human and alive. He bent down impulsively and kissed her fingers. The intoxicating atmosphere of the place had gone to his head. She was so like Filore that he forgot Filore.

"Tell me about my sister," said Leila. "Tell me about my home in the hills. Think what it is to live here behind chains and bolts like a thief—it's that I hate, that, and—but go on, tell me about my sister."

Whereupon, under the spell of those eyes, Mesrob began his story and told it uncommonly well, for he put his heart into it. He told of the days when they were children together, of Filore at the mission school, of the day he caught her riding cross-saddle first, of her race with him to Adana, of the flocks on the hillside, and then into the story came the reverend figure of Papa Marsovan and the beloved one of his Syrian mother.

He told of the Taurus Mountains, the heavenly sky, of the rivers that threaded the Cilician Plain, where the poppies were as red as blood, and beyond, the blue Mediterranean, the snow-capped mountains of Syria.

He made the picture stand out, and against it, he drew the homelier scenes, the potter at the wheel, big Kevork, on whose shoulders he had clambered to the wall, the mulberry trees thick in the village, the silkworms and the weavers. He even sketched the well and the Armenian women coming back from it with the amphoras on their heads.

He made her see, with his eyes, the train of camels bearing loads patiently, and the women rolling out the thin Armenian bread.

In some way, perhaps because he had thought of all these things often in the

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trenches and longed for them with the keenness of home-sickness, and almost forgotten his thirst for America, Mesrob made them seem so real to Leila that she leaned forward, listening to him, forgetting even herself, for the first time, perhaps, in her short, exotic existence.

When he finished she was sitting huddled up by the fountain, her chin in her pretty, tinted hands, her great eyes on him.

"Ah," she sighed, "I—I want to go home to the mountains, to meet the sun when it rises!"

"You're not happy here, then?" he asked eagerly, his eyes on her, noticing the soft, full beauty that was so much more mature than Filore's, so much more alluring.

"I'm miserable!" she gasped with a sob. "I'm a slave—that's all—a slave! They call me Aarif's wife—young Aarif's, you know—but I'm only one; there are others! And my baby, my boy—I know they poisoned him!"

Mesrob was startled. It seemed impossible! A wife and a mother in a Turkish harem—Filore's sister! The shock of it sent the blood rushing to his face. To this came then their women, their Armenian girls. He uttered an exclamation, his face dark, but she was too self-absorbed to heed him very much.

"If the child had lived I should have ruled here," she went on bitterly, "and they knew it. Oh, I know they poisoned him, I stood and saw him die, and I hate them, hate them!" She was trembling, her hands clenched. Then she turned to him. "Are you a Christian?" she asked sharply.

Mesrob was startled. "Of course I am—we all are, we Armenians."

"I'm a Moslem." She said it with a kind of passion. "They made me one. I know nothing else, except that I hear them curse Christians. The Christians are firing their great guns at us, and I"—she laughed bitterly—"I've cursed them for that, too; it's made things so bad for us. You see how it is." She threw her hands out with a despairing gesture. "I've thought of them as my people for so long that I say 'we'! But I hate them. Oh, I'd give the world—if I had it—to be free, to get away."

"And all these years, Leila, have you never tried to come back to us, to your people?"

She gave him a scornful glance. "I didn't know you—and what did you care for me? No one cared for me!"

"We thought you dead!" Mesrob was immeasurably touched. He was young and she was both young and beautiful. "We—Leila, can't I help you? I'm trying to escape myself. I have a friend, there's a chance—will you try it? Will you trust me?"

His words were almost the words of Braley to Filore, and he, like Braley, was carried away. But Leila had come to her senses, she sat looking at him and biting her lips angrily.

"Do you know what you're talking about?" she cried impatiently. "How can I go? I'm watched. If I hadn't locked that door they would have followed me out here, the cats! And very likely they're looking through the keyhole. If they find you here they'll—they'll kill you."

Mesrob, suddenly aghast at her coolness, looked uneasily at the door; he seemed to feel eyes fairly boring through it.

"You could go—as I came—over the wall," he suggested.

She stared at him, fascinated. "Where could I go?"

He flushed. "There's the ship—my friends—we must be captured by the Allies—we've got a scheme. It's risky, but, if we get away, I'm going to America to my uncle. If—when the ship's ready—you could be here at night—I'd get you over the wall and we could escape."

She listened, her bosom heaving with excitement. The idea was new and its very novelty appealed to her. The danger, too, was an added zest; she had a fatalist's scorn of danger.

"To America?" she thought, a glow on her face. "Across the seas—and they've kept me here a prisoner! Mesrob"—there was another storm brewing; she seemed to pulse and glow with it—"Mesrob, take me with you!"

He was a little aghast, remembering Filore's coolness at parting, but this turned his head. In some way her hands had

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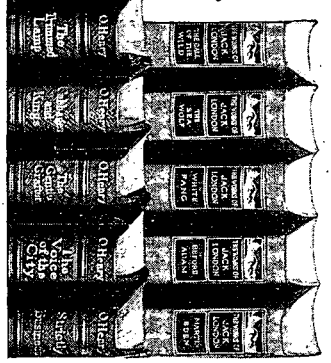

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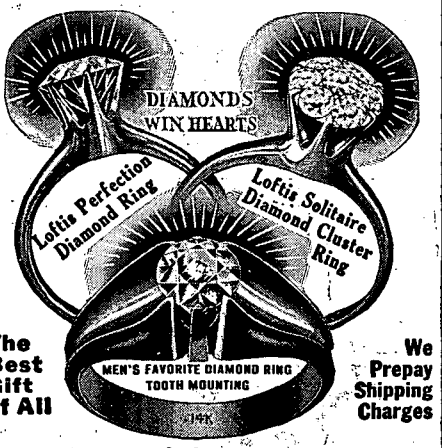

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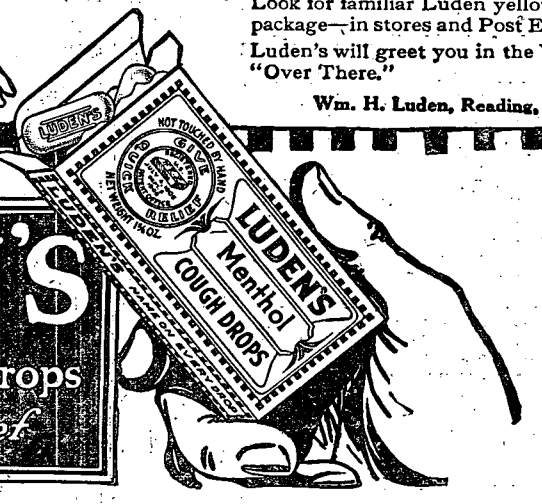

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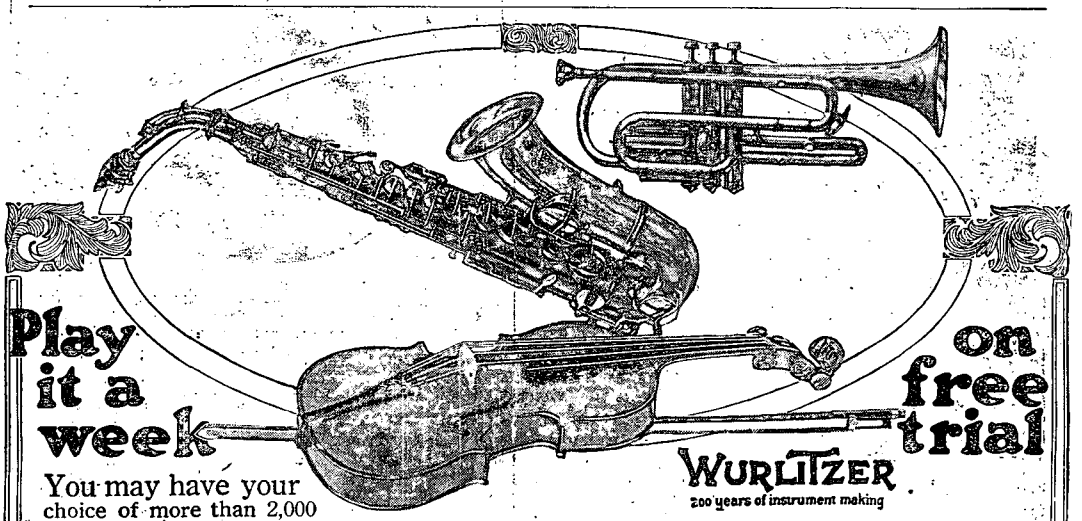

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